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AN EASTERN ODYSSEY



GEORGES-MARIE HAARDT

The leader of the Citroën Trans-Asiatic Expedition

(From a drawing by Alexander Jacovleff)

AN EASTERN ODYSSEY

THE THIRD EXPEDITION
OF HAARDT AND AUDOUIN-DUBREUIL

by

GEORGES LE FÈVRE

Preface *by* ANDRÉ CITROËN

Introduction *by* L. AUDOUIN-DUBREUIL

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IN MEMORIAM

GEORGES-MARIE HAARDT

TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

THE DESIRE TO PAY a personal tribute to the memory of my friend—Georges-Marie Haardt—has led me to undertake the translation of the narrative of his last journey. Beyond this, the achievement of Haardt and his gallant associates was of a nature to win the admiration of all to whom pluck, determination and resource make an appeal, and is an additional reason for the publication in English of Georges Le Fèvre's story.

E. D. SWINTON.

Oxford,
November, 1934.

PREFACE

THE GREAT LECTURE THEATRE of the Sorbonne was not large enough to hold the crowd which gathered there on the 30th November, 1932, to welcome the members of the Citroën Central-Asian Expedition on their return to France.

M. Albert Lebrun, President of the Republic, and many notabilities had assembled to do honour to the occasion. Amongst them were : General Gammelin ; M. Philippe Berthelot ; Vice-Admiral Durand-Viel, the Chief of Staff of the Navy ; Monseigneur de Guébriant, the Head of Foreign Missions ; M. G. Grandidier, Secretary-General of the Geographical Society ; M. Lablé, Director-General of Technical Education ; M. Charlétry, Rector of the University of Paris ; Madame Philippe Berthelot, Madame Doumergue, Madame Herriot, Madame Citroën, etc., and two ex-Presidents of the Republic—MM. Millerand and Doumergue.

As I sat on the platform with Marshal Pétain, General Weygand and General Gouraud, listening to the words of appreciation which fell from the lips of Marshal Franchet d'Esperey, President of the Geographical Society, and learned that I was to be the recipient of the Society's Gold Medal, my pride at this honour was the greater in that it was a recognition of ten years' efforts and rendered homage to the memory of one who has gone from us—my deeply mourned friend, Georges-Marie Haardt.

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It is now more than ten years since the Citroën factories started in January, 1921, the production of motor-cars

specially designed for cross-country travel. From the first experiments it was at once obvious that the solution of the problem of mechanical locomotion on sand or snow lay in the track-car. And I take this opportunity of again expressing my thanks to the distinguished engineer, M. Adolphe Kégresse, who has again demonstrated what the creative genius of France can achieve. At that time those interested in the Colonies, in military affairs and in exploration were considering the problem of crossing the Sahara, and the interest and value of such a performance appeared to me so great that I regarded it as a duty to do all in my power to further it. It was decided to make an expedition from Touggourt to Timbuctoo, and the leaders selected to carry it out were Georges-Marie Haardt and Louis Audouin-Dubreuil.

I was bound by ties of the deepest friendship to Haardt, the Director-General of the Citroën factories, who had been my collaborator for fifteen years. He was an ardent spirit, an idealist, always ready to devote himself to a noble cause, and endowed with great sangfroid and decision, he possessed the authority and power of command so essential to the true leader of men. He was, I felt convinced, certain to apply to the new task entrusted to him the remarkable qualities which had so far always brought him success.

Of Audouin-Dubreuil I had heard much from those who had known him and his work in Southern Tunis, where his ability and boundless energy had been brought out and developed as an officer of the Air Service in command of motor-machine guns during the operations in the Sahara.

On the morning of the 16th December, 1922, the first Haardt-Audouin-Dubreuil Expedition—consisting of five track-cars carrying ten explorers—started southwards from Touggourt, and on the 7th January, 1923, reached Timbuctoo after having crossed the Sahara by the Hoggar.

Whilst demonstrating the possibility of establishing rapid communication between Algeria and West Africa, and blazing the trail between the African Colonies, this journey also revealed the potentialities of the motor-car as a means of exploration throughout the world. A beginning had been made ; the movement had been set on foot ; other expeditions could follow in the track of the first.

Immediately after the Touggourt-Timbuctoo journey, Haardt and I organised his second expedition—that across Central Africa, commonly known as the “ Black Journey.” This necessitated more than a year’s preparation. The route, which covered over 1,300 miles and involved the crossing of desert, bush, grassland, swamp, and forest, called for five auxiliary expeditions to arrange for the supply of petrol, food, and material from Algeria to the Indian Ocean. The itinerary first contemplated had included Abyssinia and Djibouti. But when, a few days before the start, this was submitted to M. Doumergue, President of the Republic, he drew attention to the isolated position of Madagascar, and emphasised the interest of exploring the system of communications between that great island in the Indian Ocean and our African Colonies.

It took eight months—from the 28th October, 1924, to the 26th June, 1925—for the track-cars, with their sixteen passengers, to traverse Africa from Colomb-Béchar to Antananarivo. Some interesting scientific collections were formed and a comprehensive photographic and cinematographic record was made, and from that time the whole of Africa was thrown open to the motor-car. Communications of every kind were inaugurated across the Dark Continent, and paths were marked out all over our vast colonial empire. It is now possible to travel on wheels from Algeria to West Africa, from Tunis to Equatorial Africa, and from the Belgian Congo to the British and Portuguese colonies.

A fresh expedition was then proposed to cross the oldest continent in the world—the cradle of civilisation—and to extend the scope of what had already been done to spread knowledge.

Haardt, quite indefatigable, and enamoured as he always was of the idea of great continental journeys, had since 1928 dreamed of continuing his work of exploration into Asia. The map of Asia appealed to him even more than that of Africa, by reason of its massive solidarity, its density, its protoplasmic character, and its immensity without centre, where the streams of human life seemed to flow outwards towards the circumference from the interior—which is nothing but a huge sterile depression.

The deserts of Asia separate large masses of human beings—Chinese, Russians, Indians, and Mongols. Might it not be possible to re-discover the traces of the ancient “Silk Road” followed in the seventh century by the Chinese pilgrim Hiuan-Tsang and in the thirteenth by the great explorer Marco Polo, and to re-open for traffic that main trade-route along which passed of old the commerce between China, Persia, Arabia, and Europe? And might not the motor-car of the future play a great part in bringing together those peoples who as yet were strangers?

As on previous occasions, I determined to support to the best of my ability the Third Haardt-Audouin-Dubreuil Expedition, which was to further the cause of science, art, and economics. In this intention I was encouraged from the outset by our Ministers of Foreign Affairs, of the Colonies, and of Posts and Telegraphs, whose invaluable aid facilitated the task of the organisers in obtaining permission to enter the different countries of Asia, and in enabling them to have recourse to wireless telegraphy and generally to carry on their work without interruption. In addition, the great French scientific societies, in particular the

Geographical Society, which was the first to give us its help—thanks to the good offices of its Secretary-General, M. Grandidier, and also the Natural History Museum, loyally supported Haardt's efforts.

Of the greatest assistance, moreover, was the collaboration of the firm of Pathé-Nathan. They were desirous of taking part in order to establish a cinematographic record which by its revelation of the secrets of Asia and of the difficulties met with by the explorers would present to the public the most complete illustration of the journey.

And lastly, there must not be forgotten the National Geographic Society of Washington, which, in formally giving its support, confirmed the character of the Expedition as a scientific mission to foreign countries.

The members of the Expedition in no way lagged behind their chief. To some fell the duty of examining and working out the project and of preparing the *matériel* ; to others the organisation of supplies ; to others, again, the preliminary reconnaissance of the routes and the negotiations with foreign Governments—ancillary measures which entailed three years of travel and work in advance. Finally, to the executives fell the hardest task—that of carrying out the scheme.

As may be imagined, the problems to be solved were far more complex than those presented by a journey across Africa. Of these the readers of this book will receive a vivid impression, for in its opening pages are described some of the struggles of the long-drawn-out preparatory stage.

In addition to the meticulously detailed technical work which the factories carried through without failure amidst all the delays so frequently imposed by last-hour changes, measures of an unusual order in the domains of diplomacy and finance occasioned obstacles which the inexhaustible patience of Haardt alone could have overcome.

Those who took part in both expeditions have described that across Africa as a sporting journey and that across Asia as a diplomatic mission. The truth is that even nowadays a voyage across Asia presents every kind of difficulty. The story of those conquered by the Pamir Group in crossing the Himalayas approximates to an epic of sport, and I can testify that, thanks to the efforts of one Ferracci, our cars penetrated into regions where the sound of a motor had never been heard before, where the inhabitants of the humble villages, hidden away in the gigantic folds of the highest chain of mountains in the world, not only had never seen a motor-car but were ignorant even of the existence of a wheeled vehicle. There for centuries all transport had been carried by men or by pack-animals.

Simultaneously, the China Group under Lieutenant Victor Point—a man of outstanding character, who combined in himself all the attributes of a “hero of modern days”—was having anything but an easy time. This book will enable the reader to understand and to share their experiences.

Finally, the fortitude and endurance of the united Expedition on its way to Peking in the depth of the winter, in the icy solitude of the Gobi, in 35° of frost, when the plucky mechanics, inspired by the example of Maurice Penaud, daily and cheerfully handled naked metal with bare hands, deserve something more from us than respectful admiration. The story should be told as an inspiration to youth.

Now that the work is done and its principal objects have been achieved, my thoughts turn with the deepest emotion to the vanished leader, my old friend and colleague, Georges-Marie Haardt, whose will to conquer overcame all obstacles, whose courage and methodical tenacity were the

main factors which contributed to the final success. In this tribute I associate the young leader of the China Group, Lieutenant Victor Point, whose valour and knowledge of Chinese affairs more than once saved the situation. And I tender my heartfelt thanks to all those who with Haardt and Point devoted their efforts to the Expedition :

To Louis Audouin-Dubreuil, that leader of men, determined in action as he was robust in physique, who worked so intimately and selflessly with Haardt.

André Goerger, its Secretary-General, who collaborated with his chief from the very first, and during the years before it started travelled to the Russo-Persian frontier to prepare the way and organise supply.

W. Petro-Pavlovsky, a brilliant young engineer, who had lived for ten years in China, and who so skilfully managed the whole of the commissariat in that immense territory, launching into the desert regions a continuous succession of camel-caravans.

Lieutenant-Commander Pecqueur, assistant to the Chief of the Mission, whose reconnaissances in Afghanistan were of particular service.

Joseph Hackin, the distinguished Curator of the Guimet Museum in Paris, head of an important mission to Afghanistan, Director of the Franco-Japanese Museum in Tokyo, and his associate Jean Carl.

Father Teilhard de Chardin, the eminent geologist, whose work is known the world over.

Charles Brull, the engineer, director of our laboratories, who was responsible for the technical side of the work of preparation.

Dr. Maynard Owen Williams, the Delegate of the National Geographic Society of Washington, whose efforts were no wit behind those of his French colleagues.

Drs. Pierre Jourdan and Robert Delastre, surgeons, who devoted themselves to the care of the inhabitants of the

countries traversed by the Expedition, as well as to its members.

Alexandre Iacovleff, already famous as an artist owing to his work in Africa, who brought back with him a bounteous harvest of fresh pictures.

André Sauvage, cinematographer and producer, who, with his operators, Morizet, Sivel, and Specht, performed a heavy task most successfully.

Jean Michaud, who served the head of the Expedition with much devotion.

Laplanche, Schuller, and Second Mate Roger Kervizic.

To the rank and file I wish to pay especial tribute—firstly to the “old hands,” the mechanics who had previously taken part in the first crossing of the Sahara, and in the “Black Journey”: Maurice Penaud, chief mechanic; Clovis Balourdet, Maurice Piat, and Joseph Remillier.

Then to those for whom the Central Asian Expedition was the first venture: Antoine Ferracci, chief mechanic of the Pamir Group; Bourgoin, Cecillon, Chauvet, Collet, Conté, Corset, Jocard, Dielmann, Le Roux, Normand, Nuret, Varnet, Gauffreteau, and Gustave Kégresse.

All, in addition to being responsible men of intelligence and staunchness, possessed valuable technical knowledge. Their determination, good humour, and the success with which they maintained their *matériel* under most exceptional conditions, whether it was at an altitude of 16,000 feet in the Himalayas, or in 35° of frost during the six weeks before Peking was reached, played a great part in the final result.

And there is also the work of the men engaged in the different preparatory missions:

In the first place the valuable assistance given by Colonel Vivian Gabriel of the British Army, who did so much to help and guide the Expedition across the Pamirs.

The visits of Elie de Vassoigne to Afghanistan and the

Pamirs, of Captain Jean Waddington to India, Burmah, and Siam, and the journeys of Abel Berger to Peking, Jacques Salesse to Urumchi, and Constantini to Herat.

To all those who contributed—each in his own sphere—to an achievement without parallel in the history of exploration I am truly proud to express my lasting gratitude. Well did they accomplish their appointed task.

Since the return of the Expedition the public has not remained entirely ignorant of what was done during those 314 days spent in Asia. It has had the opportunity of inspecting in an exhibition collections of every kind of object, the fruits of unremitting toil—and to see displayed on the screen a moving picture which presents the story of the wanderers in a more real and appealing form.

And in this interesting and thrilling narrative Georges Le Fèvre, the historian of the Expedition, vividly recalls day by day and mile by mile the experiences of himself and his companions, so that the whole world may gain some coherent idea as to the details of this marvellous story.

It was inspired by the action of a group of Frenchmen in that mysterious continent of Asia, which still maintains before Europe the shadowy prestige of its thousand-year-old civilisation.

I feel it an honour and a privilege to have been able to associate the great automobile industry with this disinterested gesture which has, I hope, done something towards satisfying the ever-new demands of Science and Progress.

ANDRÉ CITROËN

INTRODUCTION

*By Louis Audouin-Dubreuil, Haardt's second-in-command
on his three expeditions*

THREE EXPEDITIONS in Africa and Asia, inspired by André Citroën, were carried out during the course of the ten years 1922 to 1932, and blazed a trail which testified to the influence radiated by our country across the soil of two continents.

On 20th January, 1922, the track-machines started off along the camel-route to the Hoggar and opened the way for the crossing of the Sahara. Ten years later, on the 16th March, 1932, at the end of the long and arduous journey across Asia, Georges-Marie Haardt died at Hongkong.

To explain why Haardt undertook these distant journeys calls first for a word about André Citroën, of whom he was the friend and collaborator. In 1920 M. Citroën, in giving a fresh impulse and increased scope to the automobile industry of France, also anticipated by several years the acceleration in the *tempo* of modern life. Having thus to some extent conquered Time, he determined to attempt the difficult task of mastering Space, being convinced of the many benefits which might be conferred on the human race by an intimate and active association of Industry, Science, and Art, and by the fostering of the mutual understanding of the peoples of the world through the agency of journeys made across the different countries.

But the preparation for, and the realisation of, such grandiose conceptions depended on many and various contributory factors and called for a master mind. Here

there were two such—that of Citroën, who originated and created, and that of Haardt, who realised, organised, and executed.

The latter applied himself to his task with enthusiasm because his heart was in it. The spontaneous initial attraction which great adventures held for him was due to his imagination ; but he was, in addition, endowed with a clear and reflective mind capable of thinking out the boldest enterprises from their inception to their practical conclusion. To his expeditions he devoted long and minute preparation, foreseeing every possible eventuality and leaving nothing to chance. The difficulties which cropped up during execution he met with calmness and resolution. If patience and determination count for anything. Haardt merited his success. And having reached his goal, each time he returned home he set himself to the documentation—which he carried out with unerring judgment—of the scientific and artistic material collected, so as to give to the public a remarkably useful summary, if not a completely comprehensive account, of what had been accomplished.

The original venture across the Sahara, of which one of the most important results was the establishment of a liaison between Algeria and French West Africa, was the occasion of the first joint success of Haardt and myself. And on our return journey we had the pleasure of meeting the man who had backed up our hopes and thus led the way to victory.

Awaiting us at the well of Tadjmout, to the north of the Hoggar, we found M. Citroën, accompanied by Madame Citroën—the first European woman to penetrate so deep into the Sahara Desert. It was the 24th February, 1923, and that night Haardt's words were : " I am content—so far. But this is only the first of many great voyages, the first step towards an exchange of knowledge between the

nations." No sooner had we returned than we began to prepare for the second expedition—" the Black Journey "—which was brought to completion in Madagascar on the 26th June, 1925.

But Haardt was not satisfied to rest on his oars. He again began to think of the future and to dream of other continents. One evening, in Paris, when he and Guilbaud—an old Flying Corps comrade of mine—and I were together, we thought out a scheme for going to the South Pole. And when, shortly afterwards, that project was abandoned upon further consideration, he mooted the idea of a journey to China via the Pamirs. A preliminary examination exposed the difficulties but also revealed the attractions of such a voyage to Central Asia ; and when M. Citroën approved the scheme Haardt set himself to work it out—a task which kept him occupied for two years.

Then, at the last moment, when the specially designed track-cars were all ready, and the personnel—savants, artists, mechanics—were prepared to start, obstacles arose. Nevertheless, we determined to carry on, to execute our plan and to reach our destination ; and in April, 1931, the Expedition set out in two Groups—one from Beirut, the other from Peking—both *en route* for Central Asia.

To us Syria threw open her beautiful desert spaces, where high officials and famous soldiers kept peaceful watch and ward. Then, in turn, Iraq, Persia, Afghanistan, Kashmir, and British India welcomed us with most kindly courtesy. After crossing Western Asia, we climbed the Himalayas and then the Pamirs. But for Haardt the rigours of the struggle in the mountains proved too great a strain. Though obstacles only served to spur him on, the very exaltation caused him to draw too deeply on his reserves of energy. For the first time he was affected by the nature of

his efforts. When we attained the Pamirs it seemed to us, as we saw him falter for an instant, that he had reached the culminating-point of his life. He looked round the vast circle of mountains as if he were contemplating his work—the full extent of which he only just appreciated.

The way to the East was open. China received the Expedition with downcast eyes and an enigmatic smile. In Chinese Turkestan the high officials, with the utmost politeness but the deepest mistrust, objected to its scientific activities and hampered its progress. Though days were taken up in interminable palavers, Haardt allowed nothing to put him out or to disturb his equanimity.

The forced marches by day and by night along the edge of the Alashan and the Gobi and through Mongolia, attended with all their physical difficulties, the uncertainty of what or whom we might run up against, anxiety as to sustenance, and the necessity for working in extreme cold, tried both men and machines to the limit ; and we were fortunate when nearing the end of our travels in obtaining a few days of welcome rest at the hospitable Belgian and German Mission stations on our route.

At last, on the 12th February, 1932, Peking accorded an unforgettable welcome to the travellers who had come across Asia all the way from the Mediterranean. Eleven days later Haardt and I were discussing alternatives for the continuation of the journey into Indo-China. Though he had not been feeling well for some days, he was in good spirits ; and as he strode up and down his room he smilingly recalled incidents of the journey and spoke of our return, of Paris, of the receptions and lectures, discussing in what manner all the information obtained on the voyage should be collected and recorded.

The weather was so fine that we went out into the gardens of the Temple of Heaven. In the course of our walk Haardt halted at a tomb.

“Do you see that grave?” Then after a long silence he added: “We have accomplished our task: the cars have left their mark on Africa and Asia. We have begun: others will continue.” Suddenly he shivered. “I’m cold. Let us go in.”

Georges-Marie Haardt, my friend, do you recall the Gobi Desert?

The cars come to a halt, and, like a curtain falling, a cloud of frozen dust settles slowly down. As the machines stand massive, silhouetted against the immensity of space, they seem to be the living embodiment of the Expedition, the life within them being revealed by the slow revolution of their engines “ticking over” as is that of human beings by the beating of the heart. Should those engines cease to turn for more than one hour mortal cold would invade their steel bodies, and their mechanical life would cease.

Each car individually has a soul; and each, designed and adjusted for a specific purpose, is endowed with a personality. Together, through the coherence of their efforts, they possess a collective soul which gives to the Expedition its full significance, its true value and its power of action.

Upon reaching the bivouac the cars are transformed; and for them, after the day’s long march, begins a new life—they become dwellings. Dust-laden panels fall open; doors slide back; cases are opened; and tents are unfolded. The doctor gets out his instruments; takes scalpel; breaks a tube. A mechanic comes up for treatment, as do some nomads, exhibiting their ash-covered sores. In the workshop-car the lathe is at work; and the mechanics, with naked and chapped hands and the skin of their fingers adhering to the frozen metal, carry out urgent repairs. In the kitchen-car the fires are turned up, and over the

petrol vapour-jets the pots begin to boil. The soup served out in mess-tins is hastily swallowed before it freezes.

In the scientific car the geologist opens his case of specimens ; the naturalist examines his insects and the cinema-operators clean their apparatus, which is so delicate that a single grain of sand might cause as much damage as the point of a needle. In the " Flag " car is being held a consultation, faces bent over maps under the white light of the electric lamps.

Soon, worn out with fatigue and numbed with cold, all settle down to sleep in their tents—all except two, who take it in turns, hour by hour, to watch over the engines and guard the camp. Then, during the course of the night, when the icy wind whistles, the wireless takes up its duty as the voice of the Expedition and weaves round the camp an invisible yet powerful network of waves which travel over mountain and sea. From its bivouac in the heart of Asia the Expedition speaks with Srinagar, India, the Far Eastern Naval Squadron, Beirut, Peking, Paris. The camp is at rest.

Georges-Marie Haardt, do you remember the joy of those rough days, the nights in bivouac after exhausting marches, the metal of the cars shining in the cold light of the moon, the men—your comrades—who shared your hopes, your confidence in success, and your happy thoughts and dreams of the return ?

For ten years Haardt and I, working in the closest and most friendly collaboration, recorded and published the impressions we had gathered during our previous trips, for we did not then enjoy the advantage of having with us an official historian, and were forced to rely on our own notes. In this way three books were produced ; and this, the fourth, bears the name of Georges Le Fèvre,

A man of letters and of action, Le Fèvre was designated for such a task. His geographical and ethnological studies, his previous activities, especially his voyage to Greenland, of which he produced a film, and his travels round the world had qualified him beyond most men both to understand and to pronounce on the countries and races of Asia. And on the long journey from Beirut to Peking he executed his task with accuracy, intelligence, and courage.

I can see him now seated by my side while we rolled along the trail in Persia or in Afghanistan. Bearing up against fatigue and struggling against sleep, he continued to take notes and, in spite of vibration, heat, and dust, to observe, to enquire, to write. I can recall him later, during the ascent of the Pamirs, and farther on, in the Gobi Desert, in bivouac at night, when an Arctic blast swept round us, and the cold was so intense that a damp towel at once froze stiff. Rigging up his little table against the car, he took off his gloves and wrapped his chapped fingers round with the insulating tape used for the electric cables. Then, when the wireless had ceased, I could still hear, breaking the silence of the night, the tap-tap of his typewriter.

We entrust the writing of this book to his pen because, in sharing our joys, our sufferings, and our hopes, he sensed with us something of the mystery of Asia, and was animated by the spirit which inspired the Expedition.

LOUIS AUDOUIN-DUBREUIL

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PROLOGUE

I. CHOOSING THE ROUTES

BENEATH THE LIGHT of two shaded lamps three men bent over a large table studying the maps with which it was covered. There, spread out before their eyes in miniature, lay the whole of Asia as described and depicted by Sven Hedin, Aurel Stein, Stielers, Julius Perthes, and the Geographical Sections of the French and British General Staffs.

Using his pencil as a pointer, Georges-Marie Haardt was expounding the project of André Citroën for a trans-continental expedition by motor-car from the Mediterranean to the Pacific, which was to link Beirut—the French gateway to the East—with French Indo-China, and for the first time since the days of Marco Polo to traverse the vast continent of Asia from end to end. More than a mere sporting adventure, this journey was to be a crusade in which scientist, artist, and technical expert would take part, with the machine as their servant. Running north and south of the 40th parallel, its route was to be that followed since the earliest ages by the Indo-European migrations which have flowed more than 2,500 miles right up to the Black Sea and the Baltic. Leaving the Mediterranean shore of Asia, it was to skirt the south of the Caspian Sea to Askhabad, pass through Russian Turkestan to Sinkiang, in the basin of the Ili, then, after crossing the vast spaces of the Gobi as far as the Yellow River, continue to Kalgan and Peking, finally dropping south to Saigon.

As Haardt finished speaking, his companions—Louis

Audouin-Dubreuil and André Goerger—broke away from the hypnotic influence of the maps and went to the window. There, foreheads pressed against the glass, they silently watched the maelstrom of the traffic, then at its height, surging round the Place de l'Opéra. Behind them Haardt's voice continued. "The highways of the world, also, are subject to control. To find a road is not enough : one must obtain permission to use it. The traffic of Central Asia is controlled by two great countries—Soviet Russia and China."

When first approached on the subject, in May, 1929, the Soviet Government was not averse to the Expedition, though it vetoed its proposed passage through Russian Turkestan and suggested a more northerly route by way of Astrakhan, Akmolinsk, and Semi-Palatinsk to the Chinese frontier at Bakhti. And it raised no objection to its scientific equipment, which was to include a cinematograph camera and a wireless set—provided that the latter were operated by Russians. On the other hand, it maintained that it would be superfluous for the French to carry arms, in view of the settled condition of the U.S.S.R. and the fact that the Soviet Government would hold itself responsible for their safety.

So far as the Russian portion of the itinerary up to Sinkiang was concerned, the preliminary reconnaissance and organisation of the supply arrangements were entrusted to André Goerger, Secretary-General of the Expedition, who started for Russia at once.¹ In August he returned to Paris convinced that the journey was feasible only if it

¹ The story of the journeys made by Goerger during the two years preceding the departure of the Expedition would form a volume in itself. In 1929, travelling by the Trans-Siberian Railway from Moscow to Novosibirsk, he went from there to the Chinese frontier of Sinkiang ; thence south as far as the Caspian to Baku, and on through Persia to Tehran, where he worked out a plan for supplies of petrol. The following year he visited Sweden, where he met the explorer Sven Hedin and then returned via Moscow in order to renew contact with the Soviet authorities.

were carried out, as formerly intended, through Russian Turkestan. The northern route specified by the Soviet was impracticable by reason of its length and the time that its adoption would entail in the transport of supplies to the Kirghiz steppes, whilst an alternative way by Astrakhan which he had examined was ruled out owing to the swamps of the Volga delta. By now, however, Haardt had succeeded in obtaining the agreement of the Soviet to the original scheme.

In regard to China, public opinion in that country had for a number of years been opposed to the exploration by foreigners of what was regarded as national territory.¹ It was felt that the object of such travellers wishing to wander about in the deserts of Central Asia could be only to prospect for minerals and oil with a view to despoiling China of her natural wealth. Any scientific motive for these explorations was suspect because, it was argued, if there were in truth some useful object to be achieved Chinese experts would not during the course of centuries have neglected to carry them out.

To deal with such an attitude called for an emissary of exceptional qualifications, and after long consideration Haardt selected for the task a young French naval officer, Lieutenant Victor Point, who had been in command of a gunboat on the Upper Yangtze for two years, which included the period of the communist rebellion. Though not thirty years of age, Point was eminently qualified to undertake a delicate mission in the Far East even at this particularly unfavourable moment, when such experienced and doughty explorers as Sven Hedin, Dr. Royce Andrews, and Sir Aurel Stein had begun to lose heart in face of the

¹ Opinion as voiced by the students and journalists, and largely inspired by an organisation known as the Federation of Chinese Scientific Societies.

obstacles placed in their way by the Federation of Chinese Scientific Societies (F.C.S.S.)—a body whose rabid xenophobia was more political than anything else, but one without whose sanction nothing could be attempted.

Point, also, did not delay to act. Proceeding at once to Peking, he gained the support of M. de Martel, the French Minister to China, and succeeded in obtaining from the F.C.S.S. a promise that a committee should be appointed to examine the project. A fortnight later this committee produced a draft agreement which—like President Wilson's proclamation—contained fourteen points. Amongst others, the Expedition was to have a Chinese and a French director, and to consist of members of Chinese nationality nominated by the F.C.S.S. and members of French nationality approved by the same body : anything which might directly or indirectly affect the national defence or the sovereignty of China was forbidden : there were to be no surveying and no extensive archæological excavations : and a member of the Chinese General Staff was to supervise the taking of cinematographic films, etc. By these restrictions much of the liberty of action of a purely French enterprise was, of course, whittled away ; but protests were useless, and concessions had to be made if the whole idea was not to be abandoned. Some days later the agreement was referred to a full session of the Federation. The result, like that of a battle between two Chinese generals, was known in advance. With hands raised, the assembly voted its approval of "The Great Sino-French Expedition of the Nineteenth Year."

All that was now required was the authorisation of the Chinese Government at Nanking. On being approached on the subject, Marshal Chang Kai-shek shewed himself mainly concerned to learn the view of the F.C.S.S. When informed that the Federation had just signed an agreement, and that Haardt had obtained the permission of the Soviet

to pass through Russian territory and proposed to cross the Province of Sinkiang and Central Asia in motor-cars—in the same way as he had traversed the Sahara—in order to open up a transcontinental route between Peking and the Caspian and Mediterranean Seas, the Chief of the Nanking Government nodded, while continuing to sign documents. He may have been looking ahead and contemplating the possibility—should these cars really be able to travel over the sand—of a considerable speeding-up of communication between the central Power and those outlying provinces which had shewn a desire to regain their autonomy, and of the utilisation later for military purposes of this new mode of transport. After some reflection he instructed the Minister of Communications to give the French delegate a favourable reception. This the Minister did.¹

Success seemed assured. Point returned to Peking, where for the working out of the routes and the organisation of supply he had already been fortunate in securing the services of W. Petro-Pavlovsky, usually known as Petro, a talented young civil engineer of Russian birth who had lived for twelve years in China. The latter now joined the China Group as a member of the Expedition ; and his technical attainments, sympathetic understanding of the people and knowledge of their language were to prove invaluable both during the preliminary preparation and the execution of the Chinese portion of the journey.

The authority granted by Nanking was no doubt a moral and indispensable asset ; but its real value in Sinkiang—a country as large as France, 2,000 miles distant, and isolated by deserts—had yet to be proved. Though on the map this region is shewn as a province of China, it was politically as unapproachable on the Chinese side as it was on the Russian ; and all the information which had been

¹ The Expedition was authorised to carry one powerful wireless set (500 watts) so as to be able to communicate with all Chinese posts, the call signs of which would be given.

received from such sources as the Swedish explorer Sven Hedin, the English missionaries and the British Consul-General at Kashgar revealed something of the difficulties in the way of penetrating it.

Since the Chinese revolution the Governor-General of Sinkiang, Marshal King, had become absolute master of the Province, which no one could enter without his permission. Point therefore telegraphed to him, explaining the aims and composition of the Expedition, and assuring him that the greatest ambition of its members was to visit Sinkiang and be presented to its Head, whose reputation for wisdom and integrity was an example to statesmen the world over. He invited His Excellency to become the honorary president of the Expedition during its sojourn in his Province, and begged for a permit to enter it.

Forty-five days later Marshal King's telegraphed reply was transmitted to his representative in Peking. It was to the effect that His Excellency was convinced that the project of crossing Asia would be of the greatest value to the cause of science, to the development of communications, and to the progress of humanity. Deeply touched by the honour conferred on him, he promised to assist the Expedition by every means in his power, and to have instructions given at all the frontier stations that the illustrious French travellers were to be allowed to pass. His Excellency, foreseeing the difficulty of transferring money in a country devoid of banks, proposed himself to act as banker to the Expedition and to supply the necessary funds in the local currency—*lans*. It would suffice for Monsieur Haardt to pay into the establishment of Tung Shen Ho¹ any sum desired, in silver dollars, for the equivalent amount, in Sinkiang *lans*, to be placed to his credit immediately on his arrival in the Province, at the official rate

¹ A private bank belonging to the Marshal-President and prudently situated in the Japanese concession at Tientsin.

fixed by His Excellency—namely, two paper *lans* for one silver dollar.¹ Since Monsieur Haardt intended to bring to Sinkiang seven cars and one wireless set, His Excellency imagined that it would not be difficult for him to bring three additional cars and three extra wireless sets, for which His Excellency undertook to pay on arrival at Urumchi, this material being essential for the execution of a programme of development of the communications in the Province.

To the wisdom of a great statesman the writer of the above evidently added the shrewdness of the man of “big business” !

Meanwhile, Haardt had been working in another direction to enlist the sympathy and backing of the British and Indian Governments so far as facilities for the return journey contemplated through British territory was concerned, and he had also been collecting information on Central Asia. In London his personality and the sporting nature of his project made an immediate appeal, and, as had been the case at the time of his previous journey across Africa (the “Black Journey”) carried out in 1924–25, he found the heads and officials of the different Government departments eager to help in every way. The departments concerned were the Foreign Office, the War Office, the India Office, and the Air Ministry ; and each vied with the other in the assistance they gave. Maps, records, reports, and itineraries were furnished, official cables and letters were despatched on behalf of the Expedition to India and Burmah, and the official channels of communication to the British Consul-General at Kashgar and to English missionaries in Sinkiang were placed at his

¹ The market rate of exchange at this time was actually 3·60 *lans* for one silver dollar.

disposal. Haardt visited London on more than one occasion and made the acquaintance of many of those who were helping him. And in October, 1929, he had an interview in Paris with Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, then on his way back to India, who promised that everything possible should be done to assist him.

At headquarters he continued to collect the reports which came in from all sources. Seven months of negotiations had on the whole produced favourable results. In 1930, Goerger and Point being still engaged in their liaison work in Russia and China respectively, he decided, in view of what had been achieved, to visit the United States for the purpose of enlisting the sympathy of the National Geographic Society at Washington. That influential body, indeed, seemed inclined for the first time to encourage a foreign enterprise and, as it had done in the case of Byrd, to give its support to Haardt.

In China Point finished the preliminary reconnaissances by the late spring, and the time came to proceed with the organisation of caravans for the supply depots.¹ For this Petro had been negotiating with the Chinese firms engaged in trans-Gobi transport, and had taken up such matters as tariffs, and insurance against military requisition and bandits—which latter amounted to paying blackmail. By early November eleven caravans, each destined for a different place, were ready to convey from Tientsin the petrol, oil, provisions, spare parts, and tools sent out from France. In all fifty tons of goods, divided up into loads of 200 lbs. on 622 camels, were slowly to wend their way to the bleak solitudes of Central Asia.

But, in November, when Haardt returned from his second

¹ In the north of China the camel-owners, who put their camels to graze during the summer, at the beginning of September make for the great caravan centres in the hope of obtaining work.

trip to the United States, assured of the support of the National Geographic Society, and when everything seemed to be going well, he received the unwelcome news that the permit granted by the Soviet Government in 1930 would not hold good for 1931.¹ In other words, the departure of the Expedition, which was timed for three months later, could not take place. It was unthinkable, however, that the *matériel* shipped out to China should be brought back, the orders for the start of the camel-caravans cancelled—in fact all the preparations already made upset, and the vast expenditure incurred wasted. The alternative was to carry on, to avoid Soviet territory altogether, and to pass through Afghanistan.

This necessitated crossing the mountainous region of the Hindu Kush and the Pamirs by way of the Wakhjir Pass, at an altitude of over 16,000 feet. And, since the equipment already designed was not suitable for mountain climbing, Haardt decided that two parties, each furnished with track-cars, should start from opposite directions and approach as close as possible to the less difficult flank of the Himalayas. One party (called the Pamir Group), equipped with new cars specially designed, was to proceed eastwards from Beirut and cross the Pamirs, taking their machines as far as possible. The second party (called the China Group), using the machines already constructed, was to journey westwards from Peking and join forces with the first on the north of the Pamirs, when both would travel together to Peking.

This meant that within the space of three months a number of fresh itineraries would have to be worked out ; the orders placed at Baku for petrol cancelled ; permits obtained for Afghanistan ; entirely different regions reconnoitred ; and seven new track-cars for the mountainous

¹ This brusque refusal of the Soviet Government was a form of reprisal for France's attitude in regard to dumping.

country designed and made, together with special equipment for hauling and cable traction. It was inconceivable that all this could be done in so short a time, but through the energy and drive of André Citroën the impossible was achieved.

For the new plan the diplomatic negotiations in Afghanistan were entrusted to Lieutenant-Commander Henri Pecqueur of the French Navy, who straightway set out for Kabul, via India, to obtain an audience of His Majesty Nadir Shah.¹ The duty of reconnoitring the Wakhjir route via Mazar-i-Sharif and Faizabad² fell to E. de Vassoigne, who at once started for Tehran by air, as being the speediest way of getting to Meshed and Herat. This change of plans called, also, for a fresh collection of whatever information there was available in London about the new route.

The seven cars for the China Group to be commanded by Point were ready. It had taken over three years to produce them and they looked like veritable creations of Jules Verne. The seven new machines of a lighter type to be used, in case the need should arise, for the ascent of the upper passes of the Pamirs, were under construction. Although these cars were much simpler and were built up of standard parts, they had been carefully thought out ; the petrol feed was worked by electric pump ; there was a heating apparatus for the high altitudes ; a reinforced plate for the passage of rocky defiles, and special haulage arrangements. They were designed in three weeks by Charles Brull.

By January, 1931, the members of each Group had been selected, the total number for the whole Expedition amounting to forty. During that month preparation was

¹ Then King of Afghanistan.

² Small Afghan towns on the way to the Wakhjir Pass.

speeded up, those engaged in the manufacture of the new cars working day and night to get them ready in time. All concerned in the venture were filled with enthusiasm. The members of the Expedition were presented by André Citroën to Monsieur Doumergue, President of the Republic. The French people now began to take an interest in the project, and many highly placed persons became anxious to hear all about this ambitious journey, which was to carry the French flag right across Asia. Haardt was ubiquitous. He gave his mind to every point : foresaw every emergency, and provided for it. Nothing was too small for his personal attention, from the equipment and clothing for high altitudes, the surgical apparatus, bedding, and camp furniture down to the individual canteen.

On the 18th February, by which date all was ready and complete to the last detail, a telegram arrived from Pecqueur in Afghanistan :

“ For three days there has been no communication between Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif, which place appears to be in the hands of rebels.”

.

A rising in Northern Afghanistan of course cut out all thought of the Wakhjir Pass. Once again the door was slammed. For two years Haardt had patiently sought a way into Central Asia and had twice been foiled by the agency of men. Now only the most difficult method of reaching Chinese Turkestan was left open to him—that by the north of India and the almost inaccessible passes of the Himalayas.

But the possibility of this had been foreseen for some time, and all the recent conversations in London had been carried on with this contingency in mind, so that the necessary arrangements might be made for the Expedition to go south through Kabul to Peshawur and across a corner

of British India on its way to Kashmir and Gilgit. Haardt proceeded to London and had an interview with the Earl of Willingdon, who had succeeded Lord Irwin as Viceroy of India. As his predecessor had done, he promised every assistance from the Indian Government. Not only, therefore, was the Expedition about to start with the blessing and cordial goodwill of the British and Indian Governments, but it was fortunate at this time in being able to borrow the services of Colonel Edmund Vivian Gabriel, a former member of the Indian Civil Service, who was acquainted with many of the high officials of the Government of India and had great local knowledge of the region to be traversed north of Kashmir.

There were two routes—one through Gilgit, with passes at an altitude of 13,000 and 16,000 feet, the other through Leh, which was not so steep, but on which the three passes were 19,000 feet in height. Colonel Gabriel, who knew the Gilgit road well, volunteered to go out to India at once to make enquiries on the spot as to these alternatives and report in three months' time at Srinagar, when the Pamir Group reached the foot of the Himalayas.

Of the main Expedition, Point was the first to leave Paris. He returned to Tientsin, where he was to await the equipment of the China Group which was being sent by sea. A month later he was to be joined by Brull and the mechanics of his Group, who were to go out by way of Moscow and the Trans-Siberian Railway. The Pamir Group was to proceed in three relays and concentrate at Beirut. The first, in charge of Audouin-Dubreuil, embarked on the 12th March. It was followed five days later by the mechanics, the painter Iacovleff, and the official recorder of the Expedition, Georges Le Fèvre.

Haardt himself was the last to leave Paris. As far as Marseilles he was accompanied by André Citroën. On the 25th March, when the ship's syren sounded for the third

time, the two men, hands clasped, stood face to face. One hid his emotion behind a smile: "You've forgotten nothing?"

"No," replied Haardt. "Everything is before me: all contingencies are provided for, except . . ."

II. THE TWO DEPARTURES

1. *Eastwards ; from Beirut*

On the 25th March, 1931, in brilliant sunshine and on a calm blue sea—like a "painted ship on a painted ocean"—the liner *Mariette Pasha* of the Messageries Maritimes, conveying the second echelon of the Pamir Group, slowly nosed her way into the port of Beirut. The depth of water being sufficient, it was not long before she was warped alongside the quay of the military basin, watched listlessly by a crowd of Lebanese longshoremen and loafers.

Looking down from the ship's rail at the throng of strange faces below, Iacovleff recognised—by his glittering spectacles and his Graflex camera—Dr. Maynard Owen Williams, the delegate of the National Geographic Society of America. Near him stood Audouin-Dubreuil, André Sauvage, Dr. Jourdan and other members of the first echelon. Morizet, perched high up on the bridge with his tripod and camera, was filming a huge seven-ton case being slowly lowered to the quay, the inscription on it, in large black letters, reading like a film-title :

"EXPEDITION CITROËN CENTRE-ASIE—TROISIÈME
MISSION HAARDT—AUDOUIN-DUBREUIL."

For some days the pine-fringed beach at Bir Hasan, three miles from the town, was the scene of intense activity.

There the members of the Expedition, with the seven cars and seven trailers drawn up in a semicircle facing the sea, settled down in camp to await the arrival of their chief. The doctor, amongst other duties, busied himself in inoculating everybody. Gauffreteau, in charge of the mess, was able to test the pressure-cookers. The mechanics, clad in overalls, spanners in hand, tuned up their engines with affectionate care. Morizet and Sivel dismantled their sound-film equipment, cleaned the lenses, and adjusted amplifiers and microphones. Laplanche and Schuller made trial calls on short wave with FXC—the Beirut wireless station, which was to be used for relaying messages between France and the Expedition.

When Haardt arrived everything was ready, and the day of departure was fixed for the 4th April.

From morning till evening the camp was thronged by crowds of Syrians, who were shaken out of their semi-oriental impassiveness by the sight of the cars and roused to enthusiasm on hearing what these were expected to do ; and every post brought beseeching letters from men who wanted to accompany us, a druggist even volunteering to serve as an assistant cook. Some of our tents were transformed into reception-rooms in which the cosmopolitan society of Beirut gathered at tea-time and bombarded us with questions. In fact, youthful Syria was all agog. In three days fifteen hundred students of St. Joseph's University had inspected "The Jules Verne Venture"—as they called it. Laplanche and his wireless apparatus were a never-failing source of attraction.

We were also visited in our camp by Dr. La Gorce, Vice-President of the National Geographic Society of America, who had come to Beirut from Egypt by way of Jerusalem and Damascus. He made the Expedition a very appropriate present. "One of my colleagues is going with you," he said, handing to Haardt a massive bronze

camel-bell on which was engraved in Tibetan characters, "May it sound only happy hours for you."

At dawn on the morning of the 4th April this bell sounded the reveille and rang out the end of a period of preparation which had lasted for two years. Though breaking camp before sunrise was a chilly business, no one had time to think of the cold, and within an hour each man had rolled up his bedding and packed his belongings. One after another the tents were struck ; by six o'clock the last strap was buckled ; and a quarter of an hour later breakfast was over. All that remained was to "limber up"—to hook the trailers on to the tractors.

"Gentlemen, all aboard !" We were off, and in the clear morning air the whirr of the seven engines sounded like that of a squadron of aeroplanes.

When the waters of the Mediterranean—which up till then had been leaden in hue—shimmered in the first rays of the rising sun as if suddenly lit up by footlights, each of the score of Frenchmen whispered a farewell to France. Greatly as the individuals in this little collection of men differed in age [the youngest was not twenty-five and the oldest was nearing fifty], temperament, tastes, and experience, one and all now felt that they were bound together in a common cause—adventure. Painter, mechanic, doctor, journalist, photographer, film-producer or wireless operator, we all, in truth, became adventurers as soon as this voyage commenced. It tore us from our conventional setting and united us in a self-contained group, a new *milieu* which offered to each the unique opportunity of starting life afresh, for it brought out some of those unknown sides of human nature the unsuspected existence of which exceptional events alone reveal.

"Forward !" And slowly, noses pointing eastwards, we

began our journey by climbing the purple sand-dunes which offered a short cut to the main Damascus road. As we went up the last street of Beirut the children clapped, and the merchants seated cross-legged amidst their wares stopped smoking their hookahs to stare. When we approached the Residency there was a blare of trumpets, and the picket of Spahis presented arms—much to our delighted surprise. While farewell good wishes greeted us on all sides, the Druse road-menders, leaning on their shovels, gazed in wonder at the track-bands running from one axle to another and back again, laying down an endless rubber carpet which smoothed away every unevenness.

The road wound uphill for fourteen miles to the first pass over the Great Lebanon at 5,200 feet above the sea—which from this height seemed to have sunk and become curved like a great mirror of burnished copper. From the mountains we looked down on the ancient Phœnician coast rich in eloquent remains of Mighty Rome and the conquests of the Crusaders. It was a final and fleeting glimpse of the Mediterranean—mistress of this rich land, with its terraced orange-groves, and tile-roofed squat stone villas, nestling amongst the green of the mulberry-trees.

After we had left behind the luxurious Syrian and Egyptian dwellings, the road passed through an opening in the rocks and then descended to the plain of Becka and the enchanting gardens of the Orontes. We were all happy, for this pleasant Easter Sunday gave us the impression of a premature holiday. With its first taste of a friendly discipline and the first meal eaten under canvas, it produced in all a feeling of well-being by the time that night closed down on the sleeping camp.

Soon after dawn, through the morning mist, we heard the hum of a couple of aeroplanes which had flown out from Damascus with messages of welcome.

We then followed a road lined with poplars. It led through an orchard, or rather forest, of more than twenty thousand acres of apricot, fig, and olive trees, watered by murmuring springs. Suddenly, beyond the trees, showed up the minarets, shining cupolas and domes of Damascus—that great oasis-city that sprawls out to the very fringe of the pale desert.

At our camp at Mazze, near Fort Gouraud, in the golden dust raised by galloping Spahis and Circassian horsemen wearing long black tunics adorned with silver cartridge-belts, Haardt opened a last message : “ My best wishes to you on the threshold of Asia. Gouraud.”

2. *Westwards ; from Tientsin*

The very day and hour that the *Mariette Pasha* reached Beirut, the Mukden train carrying Brull and his party from Paris steamed into Tientsin. They had left the Gare du Nord thirteen days before, and were still a little bewildered by all they had seen—Moscow and Lenin’s tomb ; the pine forests of the Ural ; the inevitable snow and slush on the wooden platforms of small Siberian stations ; the endless plain, which stretched sad and monotonous as far as Irkutsk. At the Manchurian frontier they had succeeded, after some difficulty, in transferring their twenty-nine pieces of luggage into the Chinese train for Harbin. At Chang Chun they had again changed into a brand-new Japanese Pullman car in which they travelled as far as Mukden, then back once more into a Chinese train, with all its attendant smells and noises.

At Tientsin they were met at the station by Point, and were at once installed in a hotel in the French Concession. In apologising for the poor accommodation, Point explained that the whole party would thereby be together and would not attract too much attention.

“ Why need we worry about that ? ” asked Brull.

"Because here they think that the Expedition is a military enterprise and that we are planning to build a motor road from Indo-China through Tibet in order to conquer Sinkiang with Annamite troops ! At least that's what the Chinese newspapers are saying."

Point produced one of the latest numbers of the *Peking Journal*, which contained a translation of an article from Ta Kung Pao.¹ He went on to say that as soon as he reached Tientsin he foresaw difficulties. Ever since France had taken up a firm attitude in regard to the question of concessions and ex-territorial rights she had drawn upon herself the fury of the Nationalists, and the venom of the Press. And now the arrival of the Expedition had re-awakened hostility the Chinese would have to be on their guard against all foreigners, or they would be despoiled of their wealth.

It was true that two years earlier they had granted permission to the Expedition to cross their country, but now they certainly regretted having done so. If any accident should happen to these foreigners, if they should be attacked *en route* or captured by bandits, then, in the eyes of the world, China would be responsible. Whereas, if the Expedition were successful, the same foreigners would not fail to report what was actually going on in the interior of the country—unwelcome evidence for a great nation which the Nanking delegates to the League of Nations were endeavouring to represent to the world as a powerful, modern State founded on the democratic ideal of its four hundred million inhabitants !

"Useless to go into further details," he added. "I only repeat once more—*we must be careful.*"

The equipment was the cause of much anxiety. Originally, when it had been intended that the Expedition should pass through Russian Turkestan, the China portion of it

¹ A semi-official Chinese newspaper published at Tientsin.

had consisted of only two lorries, but since the itinerary had been changed and the separate China Group formed, seven track-cars had been shipped from Marseilles to Tientsin. They arrived on the 29th March. As the landing of such a fleet of motors would naturally attract attention, Point had them taken in their cases to a French garage where they could be unpacked in private.

Speed was essential, for the start had to be made in six days ; and the first thing to be done was to unload the numerous packages of clothing, suit-cases, spare parts, scientific apparatus and miscellaneous instruments with which the cars had been crammed. Everyone lent a hand, including Dr. Delastre, Reymond, the naturalist, and Carl, the assistant archæologist. In a narrow space, roped off to keep out the curious, the small group of Frenchmen set themselves to work in a chaos of opened cases, piles of canned food and packages of every description. All would have to be checked and arranged in order later. The main thing was to get under way.

While Maurice Penaud, Balourdet, and the other mechanics put the cars in running order, Brull carried out the more delicate adjustments to the motor of the wireless and to the camera. Delastre sterilised his surgical instruments, and repacked all medical supplies to protect them from dampness and dust. Raymond checked the aneroids and adjusted the magnetic compasses, the theodolite, the sextant and other surveying instruments. Point and Petro, constantly on the move between Peking and Tientsin, were seeing about passes and settling final bills.

On the 6th April everything was ready. For the moment, at least, all obstacles had been overcome ; and in the small dining-room of the Hôtel Moderne, Point raised his glass to the health of the " Pamir Group," which was leaving Beirut. To his companions he said :

" You must rely on me as I rely on you. Amidst the
Do

difficulties which await us we must never lose sight of our goal." His eyes were shining, but his face was tense. "We start to-morrow at daybreak."

"Without the Chinese scientists?"¹

"They are going to Kalgan by train and will join us there."

The departure had purposely been set for an early hour, and when the cars left the garage the Foreign Concession was still asleep. But this was not the case in the Chinese city, where passers-by stopped in the streets and the shopkeepers came to their doors. The appearance of these strange cars with duralumin bodies was so novel a sight and the noise of the tracks so strange that groups of curious people collected behind us.

At the city gates police barred the way. Petro showed the passes, but this was not enough; an official had to be found to read them. The officer on duty was still asleep, and his subordinates did not dare to wake him. A couple of sentries climbed on the running-board, craned their necks to see what was inside, and enquired what was being carried. The palaver might have gone on for hours if Point had not provided for just such a contingency by obtaining from the Military Governor of Peking the services of a Chinese colonel to accompany the Expedition as far as Kalgan. So soon as this officer, who had been asleep in the first car, woke up and popped his head out, all difficulties were smoothed away. But ten minutes later there was another hold-up and the same business began all over again. This procedure, however, was normal; and there were no fewer than seven such delays on the eighty-mile stretch between Tientsin and Peking.

¹ The agreement signed in 1929 with the Federation of Chinese Scientists provided for the collaboration of some of its members.

As the cold north-westerly wind swept down from the Mongolian Plateau, driving great clouds of yellow dust before it, the curtains had to be let down, and all that could be seen through the mica panels was the blurred countryside and grey fields dotted with Chinese graves—little mounds like ant-hills. The procession wound along by the bank of a half-dried canal beside which were a few mud hovels, with groups of drab human beings at their doors. The road was crowded with traffic, consisting mostly of mule-carts, and heavy wheelbarrows dragged by ropes, which threatened to fall to pieces in every rut. This dismal landscape continued until the early afternoon, when the sight of two tall wireless masts indicated that Peking was not far off. Point stopped the column, as he thought that it might run into student demonstrations, and that it would be best to avoid the centre of the town, to keep close together, and on no account to halt.

Entering Peking by an imposing Tartar gate, the cars passed through several small streets swarming with people clad in blue cotton. In his mirror each driver could see the car behind him picking its way among rickshaws and prehistoric vehicles. So unexpected was the appearance of the machines that the crowd was too surprised and curious to show hostility, and they passed unmolested out of the city by the north-western gate—the Hsi Chi Men.

Beyond the walls, on the Nankow road, the French Minister and a few friends, who had come to greet their fellow-countrymen, were waiting.

“*Au revoir*. See you next year.” And with three honks of the horn the China Group started on its way toward its Central Asian rendezvous. At that moment the Pamir Group was in Damascus, some 7,000 miles away.

For two more hours the column moved onwards. The

wind had dropped and with it the dust, and the air was once more clear. The landscape was now hilly, a chain of blue mountains with deep black shadows showing up twenty miles to the west. The night was passed at a small temple—known as the Temple of the Black Dragon. It overlooked a pool in which masses of wistaria blossom were reflected. After a hasty supper each man set up his cot—not an easy task for unpractised fingers. Everyone was in good spirits, for the Expedition had really started, and all had gone well. If the same pace could be kept up, Kashgar would soon be reached. Jokes were passed about not having time enough to see China. Point alone was pre-occupied. Dr. Tsu Ming Yi, who should have joined at Peking, had not done so ; and this apparent lack of eagerness on the part of the chief of the Chinese delegation was not a good sign.

As the night was very dark and the city not far off, an irruption of excited Nationalist students was not unlikely, and a guard furnishing a couple of sentries was mounted.

After wandering through courtyards and round the temple, Point came to a halt near a pavilion whose red columns loomed dark in the shadow of the wooden roof. He stood lost in thought. Should he tell his colleagues what was worrying him—that on leaving Peking he had learned from the French Minister that the Governor of Sinkiang had telegraphed from Urumchi that a revolt had just broken out in his province ; that he considered that the passage of the Expedition through the disturbed area might be dangerous, and advised the postponement of its departure until the situation had cleared up ?

For them to hang back now that Haardt had left Beirut was not possible. To warn him, perhaps to worry him without valid reason, probably to delay him, was out of the question. The die was cast. The China Group must go on.

CHAPTER I

THE ROAD TO BAGHDAD

Palmyra—Phantom roads of the Syrian Desert—Baghdad—Camp at Qizil Rubat—A message from the China Group.

BY THE TIME that the last of the dilapidated flat-roofed houses of Damascus had been left behind, the road had degenerated into a mere trail which meandered on and melted into the skyline ahead. Haardt flew his pennon—a golden scarab—in the first car; and with him travelled his old friend, the painter Iacovleff, whose familiar calm face he now felt to be the one real thing in this unreal shifting phantasmagoria of light and sand extending to the faint outline of the distant mountains—this situation which was the outcome of two long years of preparation, reports, plans, estimates, itineraries, complicated negotiations with the Russians, Afghans, and Chinese, and more cordial dealings with the British.

At Qaryatain, a village of Bedouin squatters, a few astonished human beings stared out at the intruders from mud-baked walls. But here all that Asia had to shew was no more than a miserable hamlet and some traces of primitive art in the form of trident-shaped tombstones. After that there was nothing.

It was into this void that the caravan now forged ahead mile after mile. Haardt turned to look at the machines as they followed him at “dust intervals,” not too fast nor too slow, doing in one hour the daily stage of a camel,

namely, fifteen miles. With its perfect equipment, sensitive and responsive to the control of a few men, and forming, as it did, a mobile self-supporting unit capable of existing in the wilderness, the whole convoy, men and machinery, was in truth an imposing sight. To this manifestation of organised and concentrated energy Asia so far had offered no opposition ; but now, having opened her arms, she seemed to recoil, to hide herself behind sand, wind, space, pale horizons, and low flat mountains which disappeared and reappeared in the far distance like will-o'-the-wisps.

This aspect of sheer emptiness lasted sixteen hours ; and then life once again revealed itself at Ain-el-Beidha, where a flock of thirsty sheep stood bleating round a well while their shepherd drew water for them with the assistance of a camel, a rope, a pulley, and a goat-skin bag. When Normand made signs for his radiator to be filled the Bedouin smiled assent, and once more the dripping bag came to the surface, this time with refreshment for machines instead of animals.

It was not till late at night that we arrived at Palmyra and pitched our camp near a stone arch. At dawn the first man to wake thought he must still be dreaming, being quite unprepared for the sight which met his wondering eyes. No mere town in the sand, this : it was a capital city, in which had lived and loved rulers of the Orient, and once had reigned a mighty and beautiful queen¹ who had dared to pit her strength against imperial Rome. At first, as the rising sun painted the colonnades, porticos, and cornices with living colours, it seemed incredible that the city should be dead. But as the sun rose higher the glow faded and the stones reassumed their natural tint of time-bleached bones, after eighteen centuries still protesting against oblivion. Daylight dispelled another mystery, for the black holes, which the night before had appeared

¹ Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra, A.D. 267 to 272.



Ph. M. O. Williams, copyright N.G.S.

PALMYRA—A CITY IN THE SAND

to be foxes' earths, now proved to be *fogara*—the entrances to cisterns connected by underground conduits which had supplied water to the city.¹

Living at Palmyra we found a Frenchwoman, who for two years had been running a hotel built of stones which perhaps originally formed part of the Temple of the Sun. There occasional travellers—archæologists, officers of the "Control," and Bedouin sheiks—found food and shelter for man and beast. This lady bemoaned regretfully that the former city was nothing more than a road-junction in the desert. Pointing to some black tents pitched near our camp, she volunteered the information that they belonged to one Nauaf, the Sheik of the Haddidines, who had come in a few days earlier to demand justice. It was, she said, the old story of revenge, capable of setting the "entire country ablaze." We wondered what country, for along the three hundred and forty mile stretch from Damascus the solitude had been complete, the maps not showing even three inhabitants per square mile. To the north there was nothing as far as Aleppo; to the east nothing up to Mosul or Baghdad, while to the south, right up to the Indian Ocean, lay the great El Hamad—the Land of Thirst—and the mysterious Nejd. And Palmyra itself was like a heap of bones. What kind of justice could one seek there? About whom could one complain, and to whom?

At that moment two cars drew up at the hotel. The first, its radiator cap adorned with a bunch of feathers, was driven by the Sheik Nauaf himself, bare toe on accelerator. It was a brand-new eight-cylinder machine, and clustered on its seats, running-boards, and mudguards were a score or so of the sheik's partisans, all with short beards and dark burning eyes, and wearing the *kaffiyeh* or head-cloth drawn back from the temples by a double braid of camel's hair.

¹ This method of water supply had been invented, so far as is known, in Persia, whence it spread to Arabia, North Africa, Russian Turkestan and Sinkiang, where the *fogara* are called *kariz*.

the proceedings were brought to an end, and judgment was given: "No more murders under pain of punitive measures."

Outside, lightning flashed against the black sky. Of Palmyra all that could be seen was a half-ruined temple and a column of rose-coloured granite. Laplanche hurriedly began to dismantle the wireless mast.

Haardt and some of us paid a call on Sheik Nauaf, whom we found in a large tent made of goats' hair and supported by fifteen-foot poles, with all the notables of the Haddidine tribe around him. After we had been offered cigarettes and coffee flavoured with cardamom, the sheik—through the interpretership of his son, who had been educated by the Jesuit Fathers in Damascus—asked who we were and what we were doing. He was a great personage and an aristocrat who could trace his ancestry back for twenty or thirty generations. He loved fox-hunting and hawking. Though owner of three thousand camels, when he visited his *duars*¹ he travelled across the desert at sixty miles an hour, in one of his three powerful cars.

"Why go on breeding camels," asked Haardt, "now that the motor has taken the place of the caravan? Sheep would surely sell better?"

"I am not a curd-merchant," replied the Bedouin chief disdainfully throwing away his cigarette.

At dawn, when the tricolour was hoisted over the fort and the guard of legionaries presented arms to the machines as they defiled past, the black tents had vanished, and with them Nauaf, his cars, his falcons, his silver coffee-pots, his cushions, and his rugs. The Maualli also had disappeared. The desert had swallowed up these fractions of humanity as easily as sand absorbs water; and in the dead city there remained but a handful of soldiers, a Frenchwoman, and three Bedouin shepherds.

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¹ *Duar*—a nomad encampment.

The crowd of Bedouins, clad in woollen tunics, nail-studded belts and heelless slippers or sandals, grew in size every minute. Men appeared, as if from nowhere, from behind rocks and out of tombs, among them being Nauaf's adversaries—a hundred or so Maualli in long felt cloaks and massive silver anklets. The chiefs wanted to carry their rifles into the hotel, but—*cedant arma togæ*—and all weapons had to be left outside. It was soon almost impossible to enter the hall of the building, which had been transformed into a court, where, sitting astride wicker chairs, the Control Officer and his Assessors—two lieutenants of the Meharists¹—had already begun proceedings.

These officials had arrived from Damascus the previous night to adjudicate in the case, which was that of the kidnapping of a woman recently bought by Nauaf from a neighbouring tribe. The lady in question was old and ugly but very rich, and had been abducted by the Maualli, whose chief had been killed in the ensuing pursuit and skirmish. War had then broken out between the two tribes, and Nauaf, who ruled over three thousand tents and owned eighty villages, called his vassals to arms. All work and trade had ceased ; and at that point the French Government had intervened. Damascus counselled reconciliation, but this was difficult because the two tribes had sworn to exterminate each other. The Maualli demanded the heads of Nauaf and his son, to avenge the death of their sheik. Nauaf, on the other hand, claimed the blood price for the kidnapped woman, which was six men—that is, five more heads.

The whole scene was interesting and worthy of record. Iacovleff set up his easel, the cine-camera came into action, and Williams photographed all contestants impartially. At six in the evening, as there were signs of an approaching storm,

¹ The Meharists are French Colonial troops mounted on *mehari*—East African camels.

the proceedings were brought to an end, and judgment was given: "No more murders under pain of punitive measures."

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¹ *Duar*—a nomad encampment.

The storm of the 10th April had soaked the ground, and next day we had at first to plough our way through sticky mud, which, however, was soon dried by the sun. For two days we trekked south-east by easy stages of a hundred miles a day, meeting neither man nor beast and seeing nothing below the horizon, which sometimes appeared double, like the image in a badly focused telescope, so that it was impossible to tell the real from the imaginary. In fact, beyond a distance of two or three miles everything was blurred. Then at one moment we descried on the horizon a dark spot. It grew larger, more solid, and better defined against the quivering, vague background. Could it be an aeroplane? We were only certain when it actually landed, and out of it stepped Father Poidebard.

This Jesuit Father, airman-archæologist, ex-army captain, who had for several years been reconstructing the economic and military map of ancient Syria, was flying from Palmyra to Hit, to locate four Roman milestones which were missing on his records, and had seen the cars from afar as he flew over the trail between these two places.

"I just wanted to give you a shake of the hand as I went by."

From the air much is distinguishable which is not visible from the surface itself; and with the aid of aerial photography Father Poidebard had completed an accurate map of phantom roads, irrigation ditches, and water-courses which had long since disappeared. He had discovered how the inhabitants of ancient Syria had obtained and stored water; and it was owing to his surveys that several wells in the Nebk region had been reopened and brought into use. According to him, in twenty years' time it might be possible to begin again to cultivate certain desert areas, for water was not so rare as was supposed. Actually it appeared that we were within fifty yards of a

stone-lined well, and were following a very old and much-used highway from the Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf. He informed us also that the lime mortar of masonry aqueducts and walls which had disintegrated during the course of centuries left marks in the ground more or less clearly visible—in certain lights—from an altitude of three or four thousand feet. The soil trodden down by the caravans of past years, also, is denser and therefore more retentive of moisture than the surrounding sand, and in spring becomes of a darker colour owing to subterranean vegetation. Seen from above, the old Roman road then looks like a great verdant stream.

Father Poidebard glanced at his watch. He was due in Damascus in two hours. Adjusting his helmet, he climbed into the cockpit, and was off.

To those of us who had known the Sahara, this flat desolation under a brassy sky was familiar ; we were used to the cruel blinding light which glittered in the reflectors of the cars, danced on the polished metal and burned our faces under their helmets ; in the dust we recognised an old enemy. For the others it was a new life in which time gradually lost its importance. Watches ceased to be used—one looked at the sun. When it began to set, the cars would turn left and line up at regular intervals, and in a few minutes the tent-pegs would be driven and the canvas spread. Then, after a wash, everyone had an hour to spend as he thought fit, until the great red disc sank to the horizon like a deflated balloon, and the Tibetan bell announced the evening meal. Once inside the mess-tent the vast blue canopy of the desert night was forgotten. The canvas roof gave intimacy and illusion. When Corset talked we were once more on the boulevards. Jourdan took up the tale, and it was in the Quartier Latin that we

found ourselves. To Audouin-Dubreuil it was Africa once more. And Williams' thoughts were of "God's own country."

On the morning of the 12th, at a spot where the tracks from Palmyra and Damascus merged into a single road to Baghdad, we were surprised to find a signpost, one arm of which pointed towards Iraq, the other towards Syria. Although this denoted a change of ownership, the nature of the country remained the same—flat sand or fissured clay soil. Farther on it became more stony and undulating, with widely separated purple ridges. Here and there the carcase of a camel or the battered chassis of a car marked the road. After passing a couple of caravans, shortly before sunset we saw the countryside become alive with a whole nomad tribe trekking slowly northwards, their camels grazing as they marched. Next day we arrived at the post of Rutba Wells, which consisted of a massive square fort and an air-mail station. In the neighbourhood still lurked a few tattered bandits, who dwelt in huts built of empty petrol-tins—a strange protection from the heat—and lived by looting caravans. Near to this spot, four years earlier, in this limitless open space, two motor-buses filled with passengers, one coming from Damascus, the other from Baghdad, must needs crash head-on. Full of national pride, the Syrian driver of one vehicle kept to his right, and the Iraqi driver of the other, equally patriotic, to his left.

On the 15th we reached Ramadi, the Iraqi customs station, where for the first time we were greeted by a fresh breeze. Here, in the land of the rupee, we found supplies, a postal service, palm trees and grenadine and soda. We heard the twittering of birds and the crowing of cocks. In a field green with young wheat a donkey, ears erect, gazed at us with surprise ; a shepherd, like a figure out of the Bible, passed us, carrying a lamb on his shoulders;

and two beautiful chestnut horses ambled by. The desert had been crossed, and life once more dominated the earth. And we again saw water—the broad slate-coloured ribbon of the Euphrates—flowing sluggishly between its raised banks.

The next afternoon, under a lowering sky, we reached the Tigris, the second star of the Iraqi flag,¹ and then Baghdad ! The weather grew more sultry, and our faces became caked with the grey dust which rose at each step. Suddenly the flood-gates of Heaven opened, and in the downpour the leaves of the palms sounded as if made of tin. Children, the tails of their shirts between their teeth, bare feet slapping on the asphalt, scampered hurriedly to the Maude Bridge,² the boats of which held in place by chains tugged violently at their moorings.

In New Street, the only thoroughfare of Baghdad, one could see sheep being roasted whole. Under the arcades stretched a continuous line of money-changers' booths. There, parallel to the river, flowed an endless stream of people—Bedouins, Kurds, Hindus, Syrians, Assyrians and Iraqis, the last of which it was not easy to distinguish. The traffic was go-as-you-please, for it was not possible to regulate or synchronise the progress of cows, bicycles, heavy lorries, pedestrians, and camels. To the casual observer Baghdad might appear to be a city of refugees, but the truth was that all living things collected there because outside was sheer desert.

It was decided to make a three days' halt, which involved a complete change in our point of view, habits, and dress. No longer could we let our thoughts wander dreamily along the trail, and make vague appointments by the sun. The day again counted twenty-four hours, and watches

¹ The two stars of the Iraqi flag represent the Tigris and the Euphrates.

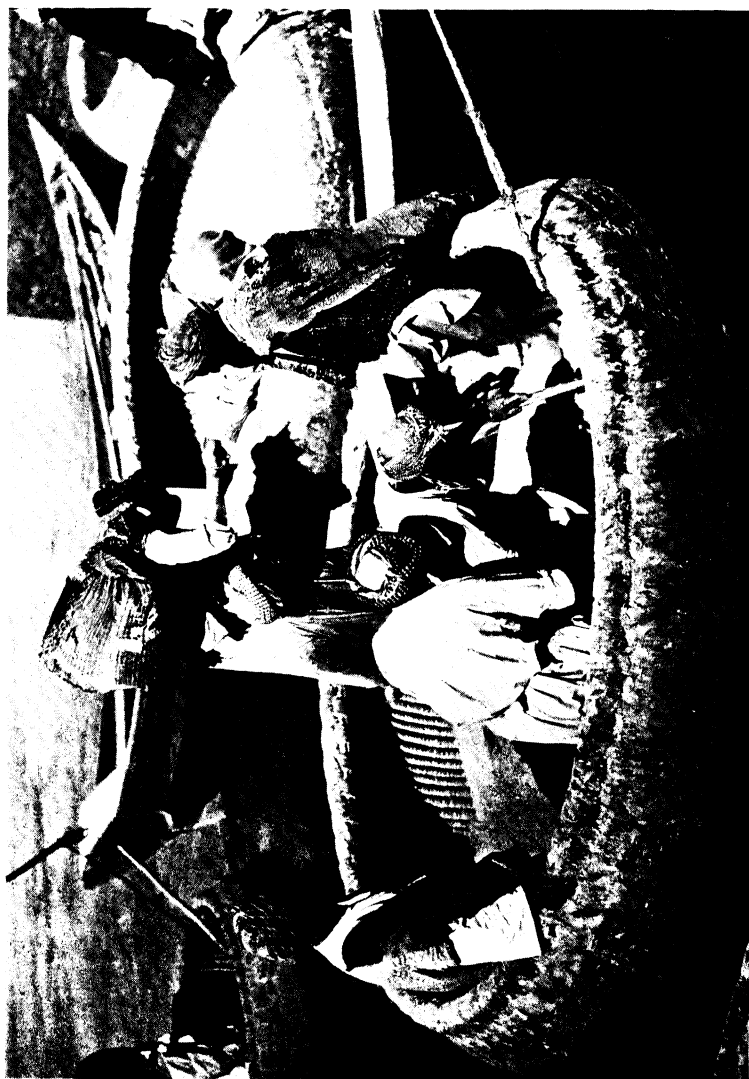
² Named after the late General Sir Frederick Stanley Maude—the Commander of the British Army which occupied Baghdad in March, 1917. He died of cholera in November of the same year.

had to be set. First, His Majesty, King Feisal, expressed a wish to see the travellers who were crossing Asia with a new type of vehicle ; and a parade, in which important Bedouin sheiks took part, was held in our honour. The Persian Minister—who had received from his Government instructions to assist the passage of the Expedition—called and submitted the programme arranged for us between Kermanshah and Meshed. Haardt and Audouin-Dubreuil signed the book at the British Residency. And finally the staff of the Expedition was invited to a reception at the French Legation. There, round a flower-decked table, everyone talked freely. We heard stories of the Turkish tyranny which ended with the War ; of the change that followed ; of the millions spent by both the Allies and the Germans to increase their influence ; of the time when a man buying a packet of cigarettes in the bazaar would throw down a rupee and tell the shopkeeper to keep the change ; when in the gambling dens jack-pots of twenty or thirty thousand rupees were not unusual ; when a Musulman camel-driver, fascinated by the charms of an Egyptian dancer, might cover her body with thousand-rupee notes, proud to offer a raiment worthy of such beauty. And then had come the depression, taxes, new customs' duties. Poverty stalked abroad, and women began to sell their jewels. The population realised the necessity of going back to steady work and returning to the old sources of prosperity—wheat, dates, gum, castor-oil beans, and sesame. At the time of our visit the situation in Iraq was similar to that prevailing everywhere else—uncertainty, doubt, regrets.

But care-free for the moment, the former Minister of Finance raised his glass and drank to the health of the Expedition.

In the *souks*¹ the gold and silversmiths were squatting

¹ Bazaars.



Ph. M. O. Williams, copyright N.G.S.

AT BAGHDAD : WICKER-WORK BOATS ON THE TIGRIS

at their work. We watched one of them, clad only in a dirty shirt, handling the molten metal in masterly fashion, blowing, twisting, pinching, and forging it until rings, necklaces, amulets, and prayer-boxes took shape. For this work, so we were told, he received the equivalent of eighteen francs a day. His raw material consisting of obsolete coins, old ducats, thalers, and Louis-d'or, was stored in a box behind him. A small urchin pulled twice on the bellows, and ten silver coins, each stamped with the head of a King of France, were transformed into a dark, glowing stream which three taps of the hammer turned into an elongated ingot. Five minutes of work, and the ingot began to take shape as one of those massive anklets worn by the Bedouin women.

The metal which yesterday was hoarded in the chest of some notable might to-morrow adorn the brown ankle of a nomad's bride. Coming originally from America in lumbering Spanish galleons, and finding its way to the Orient, lying hidden in some bank vault, passing from shop to desert, changing its form and face hundreds of times, silver emphatically knows no nationality, no civilisation, no permanence.

But it is impossible to make a Westerner out of an Oriental. And though New Street—that European thoroughfare—traverses Baghdad, it never really penetrates the city. A few steps from it one is plunged into silence and tranquillity, the hidden life of little by-ways, the mystery of heavy half-closed portals, and the gloom of the mosques where Imams intone. In this labyrinth one may even run across a small Latin church, with its inner courtyard, its four palm trees and a Virgin—an outpost of the Western world.

From the Kazimain mosque Jourdan returned shaking his head, for he had witnessed a miracle—the Prophet had restored the power of sight to a woman who had been

blind for fifteen years. Iacovleff had finished his sixth portrait since morning and was reeling with exhaustion. The mechanics had spent the day strolling through the streets, where they were struck by the numerous open air cafés crowded with men playing cards or chess but neither eating nor drinking. A monthly subscription gave the customer the right to ten glasses of tea, and, when these came to an end, the privilege of sitting and listening to the phonograph and watching others drink.

King Feisal received the members of the Expedition on one of his estates outside the city, where, being particularly interested in farming and desirous of giving an example to his subjects, he employed modern machinery and tractors. He was dressed in European clothes and spoke French. While the servants brought wicker chairs and served tea and cigarettes, he asked to be shewn our proposed itinerary on the map, and enquired the object of our Expedition.

An hour later we were received by the British High Commissioner, Sir Francis Humphreys, and again discussed our plans over whiskies and sodas. "Difficulties . . . considerable. . . . Very ambitious," was the non-committal comment of His Excellency.

Within the Residency thick carpets deadened the sound of voices ; clear water shimmered in a tiled pool ; and from the terrace overhanging the river the City of the Caliphs, its minarets and cupolas silhouetted against a background of delicate colouring, assumed a mystic beauty.

The Expedition camped at Qizil Rubat, its tents pitched at the foot of a small white-washed fort among desolate and barren hills—the last post of Iraq on the Persian border. As there was a well not a hundred yards away, near a track which wandered through the folds of limestone and basalt, we soon had the joy of plunging our faces into our brimming

canvas basins. From under Audouin-Dubreuil's tent came the sound of singing :

*“ Let me lie on my back
In that daily bivouac. . . . ”*

Williams, who had a large repertory of American songs, was performing to-night with unusual energy, as with both hands inside his lightproof bag, he changed the plates in his camera, the sweat pouring down his face.

It was the fifteenth day of the Odyssey, and we had travelled 728 miles. But place, distance and time mattered little in this new life, which was measured by sensations and impressions—not by hours. In two weeks we had crossed the borders of Roman Syria, gazed on the lost glories of a Palmyran Queen, and on the banks of the Euphrates trodden on just such bitumen as Noah used to caulk the Ark.

We had accepted the hospitality of Kurdish camel-drivers and drunk coffee in a Bedouin tent. In that time we had shivered near the snows of Lebanon, stifled in the dust-storms of Mesopotamia, and been scorched by the burning sand of the desert. We had been received by a King, entertained by soldiers, and acclaimed by Iraqi boy-scouts. We had stored up memories of smells and colours, of customs and food.

The evenings were not long enough to collect, note, classify, and record the day's observations. But, though everyone worked hard, the mechanics worked hardest of all. They slept on an average only six hours, and when they rose at four in the morning they had a twelve hours' drive ahead of them, at the end of which they had to grease and clean the cars. It was not surprising that after a hasty wash and a hurried meal they sank exhausted on their cots. Yet our enthusiasm was not to be damped. Fatigue vanished as each morning brought renewed hope of some fresh

experience ; and the days became more productive as individual efforts developed into team-work. " To-morrow —Persia : in a month—Afghanistan," was the feeling.

It was midnight, and only the hum of the generator broke the silence. The usual streak of light filtered from the cabin of the wireless car, where Laplanche, pipe in mouth, ear-phones on head, sat listening. Suddenly he seized a pencil and wrote. Over his shoulder Morizet read :

" From Peking NR 6 Beirut W 23 FPCF Have broken track-bands and are immobilised after three days' march thirty miles west of Peking stop will try reach Kalgan with spares available stop are fully confident stop Victor Point."

CHAPTER II

ACROSS THE HIGHLANDS OF PERSIA

The Royal Road of Darius—The French of Asia—Provincial Persia—
The streets of Tehran—De Vassoigne joins the Expedition.

OUR CAMP was so close to the frontier of Persia that some of us, eager to snatch an early glimpse of that land of romance, could not resist the temptation of starting ahead of the rest on foot. And it was in the still, sweet air of an April dawn, that we found ourselves tramping the oldest road in the world—a winding trail which rose and dipped, disappearing and reappearing, until it was lost in the hazy distance.

This way was known to Darius before Alexander ; to the Assyrians before Darius. It was the ancient Royal Road followed by the Achæmenian couriers, and Rome herself had no other means of communicating by land with the East. By it the Greek merchants coming from Antioch passed through the defile in the Zagros mountains to reach Ecbatane (Hamadan), Rhages (Tehran), and the Caspian ports, whence they went on to Bactres (Balkh) and crossed the passes of the Hindu Kush to Issedon Scythica (Kashgar), there to collect the silk brought westwards by the caravans from China. For this reason it was also known as "The Great Silk Road." In the twentieth century it still remains the principal highway across Western Asia, and was to be our route.

By the time that the cars had caught up with us we had

seen enough to realise that the face of Asia had changed. Up to Baghdad we had seemed to skirt the fringe of the desert—Arabia with a veneer of the West. But now, that first impression began to fade. No longer was the horizon bounded by sand alone. There were rocky peaks in the distance—some crowned with watch-towers—which grew ever more rugged the farther we proceeded. As the cars climbed the slopes, there came into view fertile plateaux, dotted with black tents, extensive pasture-lands on which roamed grazing herds, and wide valleys where the road was blocked by endless caravans.

One wondered who could live in this country devoid of permanent habitations, and who all these people might be, moving in the same direction as ourselves—as though fleeing from the plains. They were not refugees. Their faces showed neither fear nor care as, brandishing their sticks, they calmly drove their animals before them. At one point we had to halt in the midst of this living stream, for fear of causing a traffic block. Man and beast then turned their heads to stare curiously at our strange, camelless caravan. Panic ensued when we started again. Donkeys kicked and threw their loads into the ditch, women screamed, and men with arms outstretched drove forward the compact mass of bleating sheep, which undulated like a sea of wool.

Neither Iraqi nor Persians, these folk did not belong to the land through which they were trekking. To them it was merely a corridor. Nomads without a country, these Kurdish shepherds and Luristan herdsmen obeyed the cycle of the seasons. Driven from the plains up into the hills by the first heat of summer, they were forced down again six months later by the first cold. There had been times when the currents of humanity flowed stronger and such seasonal migrations were a greater factor in life. At such periods the nomads had appeared in the guise of conquerors.



Ph. M. O. Williams, copyright N.G.S.

ON THE ROAD OF DARIUS

That afternoon, at Khaniqin, the Iraqi frontier-post not far from the Mosul oil-fields, we filled our tanks at the petrol-pumps of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. And five miles farther on—at Kechel-Kechel—we came to the first Persian customs post. At Khusrawi we found another, and at Kasr-i-shirin a third. Indeed, to go from one country to the other was like passing through the lock-gates on a river. And here, on the frontier, where the railway ended and British influence ceased, Persia forthwith showed two different aspects : one—turbaned, untamed, bucolic ; the other—uniformed, submissive, inoffensive. One half of the people were in Kurdish felt cloaks, caftans, and curved sandals with pointed toes ; the rest wore nondescript European dress—down-at-heel shoes and frock-coats made of rags sewn together. The motley crowd clustering round the cars with outstretched hands was presently elbowed to one side by a soldier in a long, tightly buttoned grey coat who was clearing the way for M. Ghazini Rhezagoli, the Director of Customs.

“ Vous n’avez rien à déclarer ? ”

The Persian official apologised for the slight southern accent of his otherwise perfect French, which was due to the fact that he had spent seven years at Montélimar. “ Montélimar ? Why, that’s where I was born ! ” exclaimed Jourdan, astonished at being reminded of his birthplace at this spot 3,000 miles away. His astonishment increased when, before proceeding with the necessary formalities, the Director introduced his assistant, who had spent ten years at Grenoble. At that moment an officer came up in a car.

“ Gentlemen, I have the honour to welcome you to our country,” he said, saluting, and then introduced himself—“ Colonel Esfandiary-Noury, graduate of Saint-Cyr, mobilized in the 66th Infantry, taken prisoner after the battle of the Marne.”

“ And you are a Persian ? ” said Haardt.

"Yes," he answered, "but are not the Persians the French of Asia?"

Colonel Esfandiary, one of the military aides-de-camp to Reza Shah, had been specially deputed by His Majesty to escort the Expedition through Persia. That evening, in camp, he spread out a map on the table.

"Persia," he said, "is an extensive country." (It is actually three times the size of France.) "But the interior is an immense desert plateau. You will, therefore, have to keep to the traditional road through Tehran and Meshed. But there is so much for you to see that I hope to have the pleasure of keeping you as our guests for at least two months."

"Two months!" By that time Haardt and Audouin-Dubreuil counted on being on the other side of Srinagar, climbing the foot-hills of the Himalayas! This was explained to the Colonel.

"But can any roads be long for those who crossed Africa from end to end?" he asked.

"In Africa," answered Audouin-Dubreuil, the ex-cavalry officer, "it was for us—if I may put it so—a flat-race. In Asia it will be a steeplechase, in which the Himalayas are a jump, but a jump sixteen thousand feet high, which can be taken during less than two months in the year."

But there was another reason which forced us to hurry on. Point's message had been anything but reassuring. Why, after fifteen days, had the China Group not reached Kalgan, only two hundred miles from Tientsin? The failure of a few track-bands alone could scarcely account for the delay. There must be other difficulties, possibly of a political character. The lack of details was the more disquieting because we could not call up F.P.C.G.—the call sign of the China Group. In spite of the most delicate adjustments made in Paris, the careful standardisation of

wave-lengths, and the arrangement of a precise timetable for calling, the two Groups were not able to communicate directly. Short-wave radio still has its mysteries. Such communication as we were trying had never before been attempted, and we could only suppose that its failure was due to the interference of the Himalayas. So far the few messages sent to the China Group had gone by a round-about way, through two relays—the wireless-station at Beirut and the French Naval Squadron in the Far East. And by this same devious route the following message was now signalled to Point :

“ Go slow until obstacles are removed. Advancing towards you happy and confident. Haardt.”

This had been launched into the ether shortly before midnight, and the camp, which was pitched at the foot of the Zagros Mountains, lay bathed in moonlight and in silence. A little later an almost imperceptible tinkle was heard in the distance. It approached and became more distinct, rhythmical, harmonious, like the ringing of bells. Suddenly, gigantic in the milky light, appeared a camel. A second followed, a third, and then others. The stately beasts, roped together to the number, perhaps, of five hundred, could be seen in a seemingly endless cavalcade, which stretched back out of sight away into the night. Each carried two tins which glittered in the moonlight. It was a petrol caravan.

Although it was the end of April the rainy season was not yet over. But the mud was not sufficiently deep to impede the cars, for between the frequent showers a breath of wind now and then blew away the light clouds, and the sun appeared.

The ancient monuments along our route bore eloquent testimony to Persia's glorious past, of which we knew all too little. Some of us could just remember from what we

learned at school that during the period of the Achæmænian dynasty (560–331 B.C.) Alexander had conquered Darius III at the battle of Arbela. His successors, the Seleucids, had then reigned till 226 B.C. and after them the Sassanids from 226 B.C. to A.D. 640. Then Islam (the caliphs of Baghdad, and the followers of Gengis Khan and Timur) had brutally seized control, and many kings had followed each other up to the Kajiars, replaced in their turn in 1925 by the new Pahlevi dynasty.

Near Kasr-i-shirin stood an old fire-tower with four vaulted entrances. This—one of the many relics of the Sassanids—was seventeen centuries old, but was modern in comparison with the rock carvings near Sar-i-pul, in which a King of the Lulubi is represented as leading his captives roped together like camels by a string through the nose. According to Colonel Esfandiary, these dated back six thousand years. Farther on, a platform cut sixty feet above the ground in the face of a smooth vertical cliff gave access to the tomb of an Achæmænian king.¹ This was only twenty-five centuries old but was regarded by the local inhabitants as a holy spot. They decorated it with poles, to which were attached strips of cloth, and invited votive offerings from the pious.

Beggars, aged dervishes in felt cloaks, pilgrims leaning on their staffs, horsemen riding pillion, itinerant artisans carrying umbrellas to protect their greenish frock-coats and their képis from the rain, were among the people we now encountered. In this apparently one-sex country, Sauvage, who had a film-complex, looked in vain for brighter scenes, gayer sounds, the charm of young faces, the laugh of a peasant girl. But in Persia the women still wore the veil except when at work in the fields. The Chadd'r,² however, together with polygamy, was gradually

¹ This tomb is called locally, without any apparent reason, Kalé Davud—The Tomb of David.

² Chadd'r—a long veil worn by women in Persia and other Eastern countries.

disappearing. The Government was striving to break down the influence of the Imams ; and, though religious problems have always had to be approached delicately, it was felt that most of the old prejudices would eventually be overcome.

When we expressed surprise at the number and size of the vineyards, Colonel Esfandiary expatiated at length on the excellence of their products. He admitted that the drinking of wine was contrary to the Muhammadan religion, but said that it was none the less an almost universal drink. The country was developing quickly. It was the march of Progress ! Persia could not have found a more doughty champion than this graduate of Saint-Cyr, and member of the National Geographic Society of the U.S.A. Never at a loss for a reply, he talked in such a sincere and impressive way that even though his words might not always carry conviction, the speaker won our sympathy and liking.

But it was difficult to understand why so progressive and enterprising a country should have such a shabby appearance. The little town of Kermanshah, for example, important by reason of its 50,000 inhabitants and geographical situation, appeared from the distance a resplendent jewel set in an amphitheatre of snowy ridges. On a closer view, however, it proved to be a crumbling old city hiding many ruined buildings behind its massive portals. According to our guide these were old caravan-serais, many of which had become derelict since the advent of the motor-car and the disappearance of the caravans. We saw, however, very few of the former in Kermanshah. What particularly attracted our attention at the main cross-roads was the sight of a freshly painted notice—" One Way Street "—below which stood a policeman, in a brand-new leather helmet, white baton in hand, directing donkeys laden with sacks of barley !

At one shop, in which Kurdish camel-drivers sat sucking

at their hookahs over cups of green tea and the proprietor grilled skewered mutton over a brazier, was displayed a sign in French : " Couturier moderne." While down the street above the entrance of a milk shop, hung the inscription " Reparation des lampes et des radiateurs d'autos." But these signs deceived no one, for they were equally incomprehensible to merchant and customer, despite the fact—again according to Colonel Esfandiary—that it had been the fashion to talk French here since the time of Napoleon.

We happened to enter a large courtyard surrounded by tumble-down buildings. In one we found a decrepit billiard table. From another fluttered a cloud of fowls in front of a bicycle adorned with two number-plates, a trumpet, mirror, horn and lantern, and carrying a miniature propeller as a mascot. The proud rider of this machine jingled a few coins as he pedalled off. He was, we learned, a money-lender.

In spite of its herds, its donkeys, its old philosophy and its history carved in rock, Persia everywhere shewed signs of Western influence !

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On the 28th April, five days later, the Expedition, escorted by two military aeroplanes and acclaimed by enthusiastic crowds, entered Tehran. The site chosen for its camp was north of the city, looking towards Demavend, a volcanic peak of the snow-clad Elburz range, which rose to an altitude of over 18,000 feet. After the slow stages on the road from Damascus, to arrive at a city of half a million inhabitants was an event. Our presence provoked mutual curiosity. We wanted to see the capital. The inhabitants were agog to see the cars, which, decked with Persian and French flags, seemed a message from the West.

In their desire to give us a warm welcome our hosts had neglected nothing. Seats at the theatre had been reserved



Ph. Morici, copyright E.C.C.A.

THE OUTSKIRTS OF KERMANSHAH

for us for that evening's performance, and the programme for the following day comprised visits to the museums and a special permit to view the Palace. The inspection, with permission to take photographs, of the new Central Post Office was also included in the time-table.

"We, too, have a Central Post Office at Washington," said Williams. "And we know what modern buildings and factories look like. What interests us most of all are your quaint streets, your old shops, the secrets hidden behind the doors of the mosques, and the beauty of your gardens."

A stroll round the modern quarter of Tehran taught us nothing. The city had been torn up from one end to the other for the creation of new and broader avenues. By a stroke of the pen many of the ancient buildings had been condemned as insanitary, and ruthlessly demolished, there being no money for their restoration. In the Old City were to be seen roofless houses, the remains of their beautiful interiors showing through the gashes in the walls, and the stucco and many-hued mosaics glittering in the light from outside. Much of the former Tehran had been destroyed, but the new city had not yet risen from the ruins, and we came no nearer to the discovery of the real Persia.

No expression of it was to be found in the old residential quarter, where the members of the Kajar aristocracy,¹ fallen dignitaries—court officials of the old régime no longer in power, nervous and embittered—consoled themselves by smoking, drinking tea and eating preserves, as they twisted their moustaches and scornfully criticised the modern young bloods—the "paper collar brigade," with foreign clothes—who daily lounged along the Lalezar, Tehran's "Main Street."

Nor did we solve the riddle in the Palace of the *Takht-i-Marmar*, with its exquisite gardens, its mirrors of limpid

¹ The Kajar dynasty occupied the throne of Persia from 1786 to 1925, the year of the advent of the Pahlavi Dynasty.

water, its blue mosaics and its audience hall where stood the famous marble throne ; nor in the *Shems-El-Emaret*—"The Sun of the Palaces," with its tiled terraces, halls decorated with gold and diamonds, collections of jewels, silken tapestries, pearl-embroidered table-covers, gem-encrusted vessels, chairs of solid gold, and the diamond-studded sabre, bow and quiver which Gia-Khan-Ko-Shah carried when he conquered India.¹ Indeed, the sight of the plated tiara, the crown of Khan Hadji Matrom,² alongside the coffee-service presented by Peter the Great of Russia, and the plates depicting scenes of victory (Napoleon's gift to Fathi Ali Shah) brought home to us vividly the fact that these treasures in their glass cases were relics from the past, and that this fabulous, uninhabited palace was but a museum.

We visited three other museums, and attended the "Festival of Festivals" in the Place des Canons, where we saw a camel slain to commemorate Abraham's sacrifice. We lunched at the Loghanti restaurant, the walls of which were decorated by the caricaturist of the period with portraits of all the dignitaries of the court in the time of Gobineau,³ and we were present at the celebration of the twelfth anniversary of the foundation of Bahaism.⁴

After these formalities Sauvage, Jourdan and Iacovleff went for a stroll in the old quarter of Tehran still in quest of the real Persia. In these southern suburbs, the chief charm of which lay in their vivid colouring, indigo blue cloths waved in the breeze outside the shops where wool was dyed for carpets ; mullahs in green turbans—hadjis from the neighbouring villages—riding donkeys, chattered

¹ The Turkoman dynasty of the Kajiars occupied the Persian throne from 1786 to 1925, the accession of the Pahlevi dynasty.

² First chief of the Kajiars.

³ Count Gobineau, French Ambassador to Persia in the nineteenth century. A famous author on oriental subjects.

⁴ A new Eastern religion.

for barley and flour ; and the vendors of ice-cream, one in an old Sedan chair, offered their wares.

Leading the three adventurers into a narrow street, the guide pushed open a low door. With heads bent the party descended a few steps and entered a circular hall dimly lit by a sky-light. On the mud floor, flat on their stomachs, lay twelve men clad only in loin cloths. At the sound of a tambourine they sprang to their feet and seized Indian clubs. While they described circles in the air with these wooden ninepins and slid them over their bodies, a young man, with every muscle taut, stretched out his hands, closed his eyes and began to spin round, twirling faster and faster as the tambourine player sang. The athletes then unhooked heavy iron bows from the walls, kissed them, pulled the strings threaded through many bronze rings, and stretched their muscles in postures like those of the archers of the great Shah Abbas.¹ Then, each taking two heavy shields of solid ash, they again lay down, twisting their bodies as if to protect themselves from attack, just as the Sassanid warriors had trained for hand-to-hand combat.

Suddenly the Master of the Zukhan,² panting heavily, threw down his tambourine. An onlooker ran up, wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and presented him with a rose. The exercise was finished. We attempted to lift one of the shields, but were not allowed to do so, as they were sacred, and it was forbidden for an infidel to touch them.

One by one these proud Sassanids of an ancient epoch then withdrew from this game of princes. Donning the peaked caps of modern civilisation and their shabby coats, they became again the Persians of to-day—shopkeepers, waiters, carriers or clerks. Is it possible that in the performance of the humdrum daily task, they continued to hear,

¹ Abbas the Great, Shah of Persia of the Sufi dynasty, famous conqueror and administrator (A.D. 1557-1628).

² School of athletics.

above the tumult of the streets, that song fifteen centuries old chanted to the throb of the tambourine—

“Swept away O Persia, as the leaves of the plane tree by the desert wind, thy masters succeed one another.

“But thou, ancient land of our ancestors, bowed down with suffering, yet proud of thy long history, remainest eternal ? ”

.
 . . . “Allah-il-Allah.”

It was the 8th May, and we were at Damghan. The roads had been ruined by heavy rain, and everything swam in a sea of yellow mud. Several lorries full of pilgrims had sunk up to their hubs, and for twelve hours the wretched passengers had been waiting in the rain for the road-overseer, who finally arrived, dirty and smiling, chewing a flower. He carried a flimsy, long-handled shovel on his shoulder, but could do no more than join in the prayers of pious pilgrims—“Allah-il-Allah.”

“Give them a hand,” said Haardt, and straining the steel cables almost to breaking point, a couple of our cars towed the lorries out of the mud.

““Allah-il-Allah ! ” grumbled Ferracci through his teeth. “But don’t try it again ! The Prophet is not a salvage contractor.”

Next day Gauffreteau fell ill. Diphtheria was feared, and as it was necessary to get him as quickly as possible to Meshed, where fresh serum might be obtainable, he was taken on in a light car, in the hope that in spite of the bad roads, he would reach that place a day ahead of the Expedition. Our way followed a chain of oases. Of the great cities of antiquity there remained nothing but tombs, muddy half-ruined villages and small squalid towns swarming with beggars. We passed through Sabzawar and Nishapur, and seven days after leaving Tehran saw ahead,



Ph. M. O. Williams, copyright N.G.S.
IN PERSIA CARAVANS ARE BECOMING OBSOLETE AND THE CAMEL-SERAIS ARE BEING CONVERTED
INTO GARAGES

glittering in the sun, the golden dome of Meshed, the holy city. Crowds of pilgrims, in lorries, on horses, on donkeys and on foot, blocked the road. They were pious Shiites, some hundred and fifty thousand of whom go every year to pray at the tomb of the Saint, Imam Reza, for his pilgrimage is almost as meritorious as the "Hadj" to Mecca, and confers the right to the title of *Mashadi*. It was a strange experience to find ourselves in the midst of so many fanatical Muhammadans. They showed no hostility to us, and in fact regarded us with complete indifference.

In Meshed old Persia was making its last stand against the advance of modernism, but even here the Government persistently carried on its programme of reform. As in Tehran, new wide streets were being driven through the city, and beautiful old palaces were being pulled down. Orders had even been issued to remove the tombstones which paved the streets leading to the Great Mosque. But, as the privilege of being buried near the saint's tomb is much valued, the Government had had to indemnify the families concerned very highly.

We were all relieved to learn that Gauffreteau was better. And a pleasant surprise awaited us in the person of de Vassoigne, who, with his interpreter Varnet, had arrived from Northern Afghanistan three days earlier.¹ He had made a reconnaissance of the road from Maimana to the Wakhjir Pass, and had almost reached the foot of the latter when he received Haardt's message stating that the northern route had been given up and that the Expedition must go through India.

Beyond Meshed in the direction of Afghanistan the country was flooded. The heavy rain had cut deep channels in the sloping ground, and all vestige of a road had disappeared. Was Asia beginning to defend herself?

¹ See page 40.

CHAPTER III

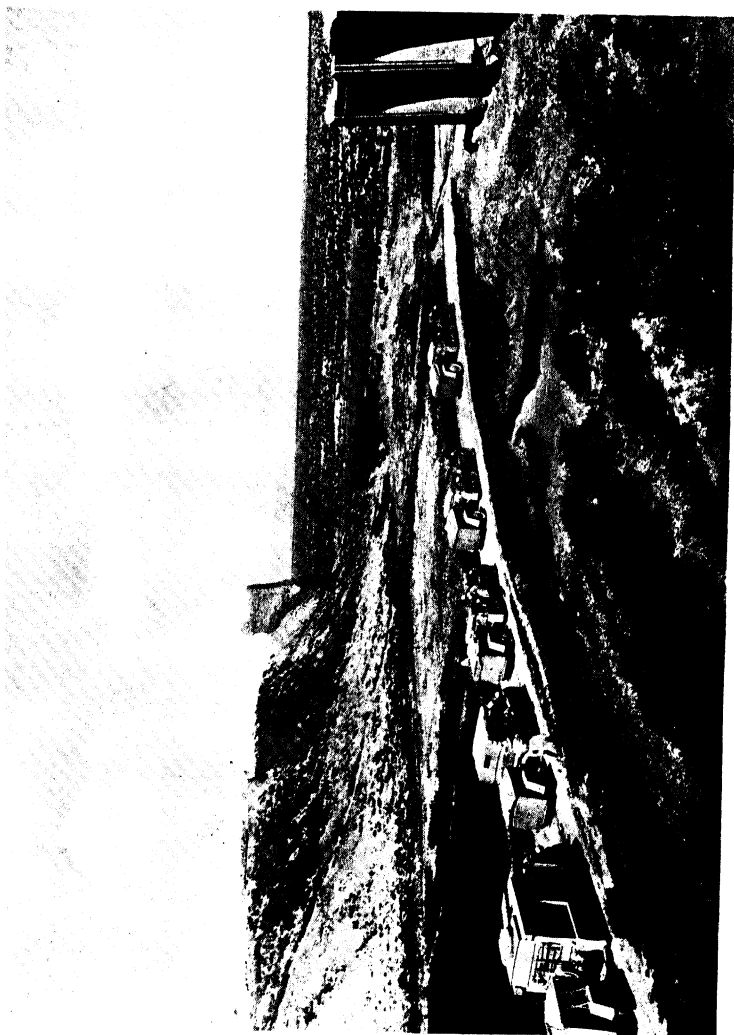
THE SACRED SOIL OF AFGHANISTAN

Islam Kaleh—The Governor of Herat—Baba Darya and Baba Motor
—The arrival at Kabul—The Valley of Bamian.

SOLEMNLY RAISING THEIR GLASSES, Colonel Esfandiary and his staff officer expressed the hope that we had not been disappointed by our reception in Persia. But they were frankly anxious regarding our welfare when on Afghan soil. The country had no roads, and was not really safe for travellers, as the tribesmen were turbulent, and there was fighting in the north among the Usbegs.

“God-speed. I drink to your good luck and success,” were the Colonel’s farewell words.

To judge if the fine weather were likely to continue we looked at the *badjirs*—the little chimneys set up between the domes of baked mud which crowned the roofs of the houses. These acted as windsails to cool the rooms where the inhabitants passed the hottest hours of the day, and were always turned up wind. Their present position indicated set fair. And that morning, with this augury of fine weather, the prevailing wind brought good news, in the shape of a wireless message from the China Group, via Beirut, to say that it was starting from Kalgan at the moment we were saying good-bye to Persia and entering upon the broad no-man’s-land between the last Persian village and the first Afghan post. For de Vassoigne this



Ph. M. O. Williams, copyright N.G.S.

ISLAM KALEH, THE FRONTIER POST OF AFGHANISTAN

stretch of country had unhappy memories, his car, a few months earlier, having been bogged there for thirty-six hours, until hauled out by some passing oxen. But spring had already accomplished miracles. The earth was dry, and a thirty-five minutes run brought us to Islam Koleh.¹ Circling a massive earthen wall, the leading car stopped in front of the citadel, from the embattled walls of which invisible guns might quite well have been levelled at us. As a matter of fact, rifles there were—six of them—but held upright at the “present” by six stalwart Afghans. The “Colonel Sahib,” who commanded these bare-footed warriors slung all over with cartridge-belts, touched his astrakhan cap in a salute.

“Salaam Alaikum . . . Mekher Bashi . . . Jouri . . . Tayere . . . Khodar Fiez . . . Shoman . . . Manda Na Bashi. . .”

Haardt, standing upright in his car, returned the salute and, looking straight into the eyes of the Afghan, asked Varnet what this warlike officer was trying to say.

“He says, ‘Your foot on my eye!’ which is a polite form of address, and adds that his eyes gleam with joy at your arrival, that his one desire is to please you, and that he hopes that you are not tired.”

A few minutes later we were sipping green tea at a table spread with a white cloth, laden with plates of fruit, almonds, jams, pink and blue sweet-meats, fresh pistachios, dates and prunes. This was our first surprise on the soil of that country where every male inhabitant is popularly supposed to carry a gun—of which any visitor may be the target.

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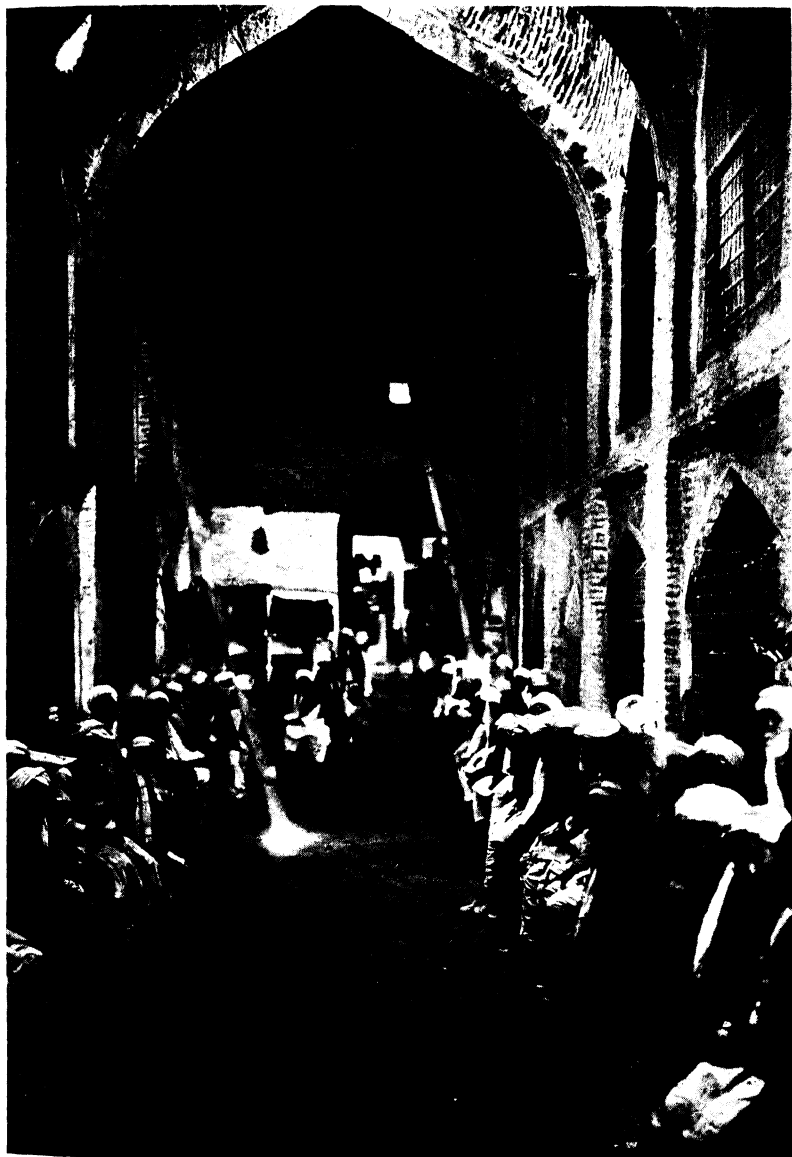
Beyond Islam Koleh the long valley which our road had followed from Mesopotamia was barred by the ranges of the snow-capped mountains of the Hindu Kush. Here

¹ The fort of Islam, formerly called Kafir Koleh, the Fort of Infidels.

ended the rich district which had attracted hordes from the Great North from time immemorial. We were on the confines of Khurasan, a country where twenty different races mingled, and people were still divided up into the three primitive categories of nomad, raider, and settler. Engines purring, we kept steadily on our way under the pensive gaze of watching shepherds, and before long came to the high walls of a large city. As we got closer we could see that these walls were double, and in some places triple, with watch-towers at regular intervals, and were protected by a deep moat. Gathered round an old mosque of sun-bleached blue enamel by the side of a stream, awaiting our arrival, stood a knot of bare-footed, rude-featured Afghans in flowing shirts and baggy cotton trousers. But, astonished as they were at our appearance, they showed no undue haste to get out of our way. Their numbers quickly increased, and it was in hundreds that they preceded the cars under the heavy arched gateway which gives access to Herat¹— that stronghold at the cross-roads of India and the West, which has witnessed countless sieges and several times been completely destroyed.

With eyes still dazzled by the sudden change from the brilliant May sunlight, we found ourselves plunged in the deep shade of a covered-in street. We had the sense of expectancy that one experiences in the darkened proscenium of a theatre when awaiting a change of scene. And, unaccustomed as we were to this semi-gloom of overhead light filtered through coarse screens, such as formed the roof of the street, each sensed instinctively that he was being spied on by the curious eyes of thousands of whispering onlookers. Williams, his glasses glittering in the gloom like carbuncles, wiped his dry lips ; Iacovleff cleared the dust from his eyelashes and let his pencil wander over his paper in vague impressions ; while

¹ Formerly called Alexandria-in-Arya.



Ph. M. O. Williams, copyright N.G.S.

A COVERED-IN STREET IN HERAT

Morizet loaded his camera with film as though feeding a belt into a machine gun. In the presence of the changing picture, with its riot of harmonised colour, so unexpectedly projected before our eyes, we felt that this was the real East at last. The place in which we were was actually only a covered-in bazaar. But life there had not changed since the days of the Caliphs, and it was partly a realisation of this changelessness which added to the almost disturbing beauty of the scene. The lighting was deceptive. It had about it a magic quality, for it enriched alike the golden glitter of the *baboosh* maker's brocades, the sheen of the silks, and the green of the cucumbers, while it softened the crude colour of the raw meat displayed on the open stalls.

“ Khabardar ! ” (“ Look out ! ”)

We advanced slowly. By the time we reached the Chahar-Su, where four cross-roads meet, the people could not restrain their curiosity, pushing in from all sides, until we were forced to stop. It was the hour when the bakers were taking their wafer-thin loaves from the arched ovens ; when the water-carriers' donkeys passed dripping through the streets ; when the hoods were taken off the willow cages of the fighting quails so that they might challenge ; when the swarms of beggars with inflamed eyes redoubled their prayers. All stared at us open-mouthed ; and the public writer dropped his ink-horn under the feet of a nervous horse ridden by a Turkoman. When the headlights of the wireless car were switched on a quiver of wonder ran through the crowd, which laughed hysterically at the honk of the horn.

At the far end of the bazaar we again passed through the city wall to a small pink house standing in a large garden gay with flowers and the song of birds, its verandah overlooking a tranquil pool. Here, by a long table set for a meal, stood forty servants awaiting our orders. The

major-domo bowed low : " His Excellency, the Governor of Herat, welcomes the Expedition to his Province and wishes you to make yourselves at home."

The warmth of this reception did not somehow fit in with the reputation of our host, Abd Ur Rahim Khan, whom everyone in Persia regarded as an adventurer. That evening, wearing a smart uniform and a *kola* of grey astrakhan adorned with a military badge, he received us at his headquarters in the wing of a fortified building, which also housed stables, arsenal and servants' quarters. On one wall of a small reception room furnished in European style hung large maps of Europe and Asia, with the place-names in Persian character. A tiny red patch in one corner represented France. It looked very far away !

After greeting us cordially, the Governor introduced his son, and the hard anxious expression of his face softened. The only guard of this fierce soldier, who had crushed rebellion with an iron hand, made himself master of Herat after beheading fifty of his enemies, and now ruled despotically over Persians, Timouris, Yamchedis, Hazaras and Turkomans, was the twelve-year old lad armed with Mauser and filled bandolier whose hand he held. His father was of opinion that it was never too early to learn to handle arms.

To his guests this despot, who would punish a thief on the spot by cutting off his hand, showed a gentler side. He suggested a walk to a hill whence could be obtained a magnificent view of the country for forty miles in all directions. This conveyed some idea of the importance of the colony founded by Alexander, which once supported a population of six million and now included all the villages between Ghurian and Obeh. On that hill lies buried a celebrated poet, and His Excellency invited us to camp near by, where we could enjoy the scenery. We explained that unfortunately our stay had to be very short.

"Let it be as you wish." The Governor of Herat made a sign to one of his followers, who carried a thermos flask of water for his ablutions, and thus intimated that the audience was at an end. Then, prostrate between his son and one of his officials, striking his forehead in the dust and looking towards Mecca, Abd Ur Rahim Khan prayed.

Ferracci, who wanted to sheath the track-rollers with aluminium, was fortunate enough to discover in the bazaar a foundry, in which, without waste of time, he started to make an earthen mould for a casting. While an inquisitive crowd collected on the doorstep, blocking the entrance, the owner of the shop stood in a dark corner smelling a rose and listening. Asked when the casting could be begun, he replied: "At once," which Varnet interpreted as meaning in one hour, or three, or possibly never. It all depended on a neighbour, who was jealous of the smith and might cast a spell over him. This man, a tall fellow wearing a yellow turban, was in the shop; and his presence must have been noticed by the smith, who stood perfectly still, arms motionless at his sides, then suddenly doubled up as if seized with cramp.

"A spell!" muttered Ferracci, "we must break it at once. Collet, your blow-lamp."

The crowd began to melt away as Collet, swinging his lamp in fiery circles, advanced towards the weaver of spells. In a moment the doorway was empty, and with the rest had vanished the man with the yellow turban. The spell had been broken, and its late victim began vigorously to work his goatskin bellows.

From Herat we turned south towards Farah instead of continuing our easterly course and following the direct route to the Wakhjir Pass. From Farah we planned to go east again as far as Kandahar, and then turn north-east to Kabul, thus making a five hundred mile detour

round the western spurs of the Hindu Kush.¹ We were to take the road followed twenty-two centuries before by Alexander the Great, who, after crossing the Adraskand, received the submission of the Drangianes, and, farther to the south, at a point which commands the crossings of the Indus, founded the city of Alexandria-in-Archosia, now called Kandahar. The road was good, the scenery rugged and wild. Unlike the rolling mountains which had flanked our path in Persia, jagged peaks towered against the sky. On our left began the steep slopes of an enormous mountain range which rose higher and higher towards the east, hiding behind it the mysterious Kohistan, which is still one of the least known parts of Asia. But though the road was good there were no bridges, and the crossing of four great rivers and a number of smaller streams presented serious difficulties. Fortunately we had arrived in Afghanistan at the most favourable season, when the streams, though no longer swollen, were still running sufficiently deep to allow of the passage of ferry-boats. It is this problem of the rivers which makes the traffic on Afghan roads so intermittent. Should an unexpected flood occur, a journey which normally lasts ten days may take three months. Any traveller detained in this way stops at a near-by village, adopts its customs and takes employment until the water goes down.

We forded the first large river—the Adraskand—without any trouble, being guided by three natives, who went ahead hand-in-hand, showing where the water was not more than waist-deep. As a precaution, however, we lightened the loads of the cars, which got across slowly without drowning the engines.

Farther south, the passage of the Farah Rud, over

¹ Since that time, the Afghan Government has built many new roads, among them a direct road from Herat to Kabul via Haza Rajat. These new routes were described by M. J. Hackin in a lecture before the Royal Geographical Society in London on the 25th November, 1933.



Ph. Montet, copyright E.C.C.A.

CROSSING THE FARAH RUD

150 yards wide and in places more than a fathom deep, proved a less easy task. Here the natives assembled on the banks in hundreds and were all out to help. Their method of getting the cars over was to cling on to drag-ropes and haul frantically with fervent invocations to Allah. But, in spite of the abuse and the chanties of a headman who beat time with a fly-whisk, they were quite incapable of pulling together ; and, on the whole, Haardt found it better to rely on mechanical power and a tackle anchored on the far bank. One end of a 300-yard length of $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch steel cable was carried over by the natives and was followed by a couple of mechanics riding pick-a-back. The latter rigged up a holdfast consisting of a dozen long steel pickets driven into the ground, and lashed to it a snatch-block through which the cable was rove. A car was hitched on to each end of the cable. One was then driven back from the water's edge and hauled the other, with engine completely submerged, to the far side. In this way, to the clapping of hands, the appreciative grunts of the Afghans and the neighing of the waiting horses, the whole fleet got across in three hours.

For five days on end we now advanced under a burning sun, in a heat rendered almost unbearable by a persistent following wind. The country was barren and wild except in the vicinity of the few fortified hamlets and ancient cemeteries, with their stone-crowned mounds, scattered here and there. About noon on the 29th May we sighted an approaching car. We knew, of course, that M. Hackin, the archæologist, and Commander Pecqueur were to join the Expedition at Girishk.¹ But this did not lessen our joy at meeting in this forsaken spot the two dust-covered friends and fellow-countrymen who were to share our lot for months to come. The newcomers were equally pleased

¹ This meeting had been arranged in Paris several months before and confirmed by telegrams which reached us at Damascus and Tehran.

to see us, for after leaving Kabul they had had to wait a whole month at Girishk. They had crossed the Helmand, which is a very swift flowing river, by two ferry-boats which Muhammad Gul Khan, the Afghan Minister of the Interior, had had specially built for the Expedition, each boat being able to carry a load of three tons.

At Girishk we camped in a garden fragrant with white pomegranate blossom, where we were soothed by the soft cooing of innumerable doves. Abd Ul Satar, the Governor of the City, who had placed this enchanting retreat at our disposal, also offered us the help of his boatmen in crossing the Helmand. While preparations were being made for this the doctor held consultations for the sick natives, who collected in crowds on the verandah of our house, asking for medicine. Many were suffering from intermittent fever ; some had enlarged spleens, others swollen gums. Among them was an old man whose face had been eaten by a hideous sore, who genuinely believed that medicine could give him a new nose. The local practitioner had done all he could for these people, but the nick of a razor on the edge of the eyelid is as little effective against myopia as the application of a red-hot iron to the wrist is against rabies. Jourdan, making rapid but sure diagnoses, prescribed simple remedies and a diet.

“ Green vegetables no doubt,” said Hackin, smiling. “ But vegetables are unknown to these people. Most of them eat nothing but dry bread morning and evening ; the richer ones gorge themselves with pilau,¹ and use bread only for wiping their mouths. Give them medicine ! Don’t tell them to wash their eyes with ‘ boiled water.’ Give them a small bottle of it and tell them to wash their eyes ‘ with that.’ ”

Some of them, believing themselves to be afflicted with a mysterious disease, smiled as they posed in front of the

¹ Grilled mutton with rice—the kabob of the Persians.



Ph. M. O. Williams, copyright N.G.S.

JOURDAN GIVES A CONSULTATION AT GIRISHK

cine-camera, proud to be treated by the whirring magic boxes. They were all naïve and credulous, even the Sarkalis (Secretaries) of the Governor—highly sophisticated young men who wore patent leather shoes on their bare feet. But the shoes were without laces, for they had to be taken off five times a day at the time of prayer.

Ferracci and Varnet meanwhile spent the day arranging for the passage of the river, moored close to the near bank of which they found a couple of narrow, high-gunwaled boats. Here, also, they made the acquaintance of a curious old man with bloodshot eyes who wore a long waistcoat barely covering his shrivelled thighs and an enormous turban. He was an Anzara, a Muhammadan of the Shiite sect, and chief of the tribe which had the monopoly of ferrying passengers across the rivers in Southern Afghanistan. After consultation with Baba Darya, or "Father of the River," as everybody called him, it was agreed that each of these craft could safely carry either a car or a trailer, but that two boats would have to be lashed together for the heavy wireless car. This old ferryman had a remarkable influence over his crew of twenty, for he was at one and the same time their foreman, the head of their family and their tribal chief. Moreover, he was a born actor, and possessed a remarkable repertory of oaths, invocations and abuse—a very useful gift for making his wooden-headed people understand the simplest order. When anything went wrong he ground his teeth, and his white beard bristled : " May my spittle cover the faces of the lot of you ! "

With much shouting, grunting and clatter the first trailer was embarked. The moorings were then dropped, and the craft was left to the mercy of an eight-knot current, which brought her to the island here dividing the river into two branches. To manœuvre round the sand-spit needed some skill ; but the ferrymen managed to tow and pole the

boat about fifty yards upstream so that when she was once more cast off in the current she grounded on the far bank exactly at the spot where the unloading was to take place.

On the 1st July came the turn of the wireless car, which was hauled on to the raft formed by lashing the two ferry-boats together. Ferracci took command of the operation, for Baba Darya did not believe that such a heavy mass could be embarked and confined himself to giving moral support, which consisted mainly of yelling at his faithful men : " Push, you set of infidels ! How can God let you live ? " Thus heartened, they shoved and hauled and sweated, and got the car safely on board. To Baba Darya this achievement was nothing short of a miracle. And being an expert himself, he could appreciate the professional skill of another. Bowing in homage to the chief mechanic of the Expedition, he said solemnly : " Baba Motor."

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"No 57 FPCG 87 22100 FPCF. Beirut Radio Temple Peilingmiao May 22nd 0010. Your 202 received. Happy to learn your successful progress eastwards. Hope to reach Kashgar July twentieth. Since leaving Kalgan after adjustments by Brull, track troubles completely ceased. Equipment cars first class. Petrol consumption excellent. Steering and climbing power splendid. V. Point."

Thus did the wireless car repay us for the five hours spent in getting it across the river. This message, however, via Beirut, was dated May 22nd, and was seven days late. The failure to get into direct touch with the China Group¹ was doubtless due to the interference of the Himalayas. But we hoped, nevertheless, that the two units would succeed before long in talking without relays, as the distance between them was rapidly decreasing.

¹ For the devious channels of the wireless communication at this time, see page 71.



Ph. Mordax, copyright L.C.C.A.

THE WARRIOR-DANCERS OF MUKUR

Hackin, who knew the country and spoke several of its dialects, expounded to us the meaning of many local customs, and so added much to our interest in the life of the Afghans. For instance, we learned that the natives enlarged the nostrils of donkeys to permit the animals to breathe more freely ; that they dyed the manes of horses to prevent the hair from dropping out ; that they used narcotics to tame eagles ; that mothers quieted their babies with small doses of opium ; and that the healers often had to wean from the drug infants who had at the age of six months become opium addicts.

But Afghanistan itself was not so simple. As we began to learn more about the country many things were revealed to us. For centuries the road which we were following had possessed political rather than commercial importance, because if Kandahar was the door to the plains of India, Herat was the key of the door. And for a hundred years Afghanistan's two mighty neighbours have engaged in ceaseless political rivalry. At the time of our visit the air was tense with latent antagonism. At Kandahar we sensed the influence of Britain just as we felt the hand of the Soviet at Herat.

From amongst the natives dreamily smoking their hookahs, as they squatted cross-legged on rugs at the thresholds of the small isolated inns along our road, it would have been difficult to pick out those whose names were not on some confidential pay-list at a dozen rupees a month, for many of these apparent loafers had a specialised trade. They could recognise by the twist of the turban of a passer-by whether he belonged to the tribe of Nursai, which is affiliated to the Durani ; or were an Asara, of Mongol origin ; or a Tajik from Kabul ; or an Otak from the confederation of the Ghilzai. These silent but watchful smokers could talk Kafir with the people from Luristan, Pushtu with the inn-keepers, and Persian with their

unofficial superiors. The arrival of a stranger to the village was signalled by a wink. The traveller was then shadowed to the serai, where, if suspected of intrigue, he was denounced and forced either to lay his cards on the table or to flee for his life. Our presence aroused no distrust. On the contrary, we met with a welcome which was the quintessence of thoughtful politeness. At Kandahar, Muhammad Gul Khan offered the Expedition the use of the "Guest House," a former royal residence, where the gardens combined oriental luxuriance with an orderliness and formality suggestive of Versailles. But it was a Versailles from whose terraces the eye could wander right up to snow-clad ridges on the north, to the distant haze of the desert in the east, to golden crops and apricot-perfumed gardens in the south, or to the glow of the sunset mirrored in the great sheets of water in the west.

At Mukur receptions were followed by fêtes to which entertainers were summoned from afar—warrior-dancers, with antimony-painted eyelids and arms loaded with bracelets, who whirled madly round, eyes downcast, whipping their faces with their hair. At Ghazni, the cook of the Royal Household, specially sent from Kabul, prepared supper for us in our camp. The menu comprised soup, fish, roast, vegetables and dessert, all cooked European fashion and served on Royal porcelain at a table covered with a white cloth bearing the Royal Arms and decorated with flowers and crystal. This display of Western luxury was a delicate attention which we appreciated the more for the incongruity of its setting—a city four thousand miles from Europe, in which an adulteress is still stoned by the crowd, a thief is nailed by the ears to the door of his victim's house, and a political prisoner is blown from the muzzle of a gun.

By the time we left Herat, Williams had regretfully to admit that the New York skyscrapers would probably not



THE CROWD OF SPECTATORS AT MUKUR

last as long as the twelve-hundred-year-old citadels of sun-dried brick which we passed. The more he saw, the more he was of opinion that Afghanistan, preserved from undue outside influence, had remained unspoiled, and that the frontier sign "*Without a passport entrance to the pure and pious land of Afghanistan is forbidden,*" was justified. When we approached Kabul, therefore, he was doubly surprised at the sight of a well-watered and carefully laid out boulevard over thirty yards wide, bordered with poplars, which began at the entrance to the new city and ran on straight as a die for four miles. When, after slowly circling a well-kept lawn gay with flower beds, our seven cars started in a procession up this avenue, we felt as if we were entering Kabul by its Champs-Élysées.

At the head of the avenue stood a royal palace, on both sides of which were Government residences—lofty massive buildings with domes and slate roofs. Our astonishment at finding the architecture of Geneva and the Hague reproduced here in Asia, and at seeing all this official and sober stateliness, these monumental stairways and majestic porticos, was intensified when we discovered that the city was dead—had died before birth. The windows were without glass, the door-openings without doors, the staircases without stairs, and the gardens were deserted. It was the grandiose and impressive failure of the dream of a young King—Amanullah—who in a frenzy of modernism had decided to change everything—to destroy the old and to build anew.¹ But the resultant clash of conflicting ideas and principles had brought about a tremendous upheaval. The people revolted. The innovator had to flee. And it is the old Kabul with its earthen walls, its winding streets, its acacia and bay trees, which remains to-day the true capital of Afghanistan.

¹ This is vividly described by Dr. Maynard Owen Williams in an article "Afghanistan Makes Haste Slowly," in the *Geographic Magazine*, December, 1933.

To us Western birds of passage the Ministers of State who had received us in flower-filled gardens and illuminated palaces, those others who had placed at our disposal princely residences, had repaired roads, built ferry-boats, and facilitated the crossing of rivers, all, from highest to lowest, down to our interpreter Ali, had been the most perfect hosts. But, one and all, they stubbornly refused to adopt our ideas. Such were Haardt's thoughts when at a private audience granted by King Nadir Shah to ten members of the Expedition he expressed thanks to His Majesty for the wonderful reception we had been given at Kabul, and for the kindly welcome we had received from all classes of the community. The King said simply :

" I owe a debt of gratitude to France. I was received there as a friend. When I was ill I was cared for as one of your people. Your Expedition comes from France. It was conceived by a Frenchman. That is sufficient reason for me to show you my goodwill."

A stiff climb, the crossing of a pass, then a descent into a deep gorge, which had been filled with loose rocks by a landslide, brought us to the Valley of Bamian—flat, cultivated, two miles wide, and silent. Pointing to a small arcaded verandah that clung to the side of a hill, Hackin informed us that it had been his workshop during the previous September. To the north, a cliff of one of the lower ridges of the Hindu Kush was honeycombed irregularly with caves suggestive of the dwellings of troglodytes. This, he explained, was a place of pilgrimage where two thousand monks had lived and studied. In his writings the Chinese pilgrim Hsuan Ts'ang had given a somewhat smaller number, but he had visited Bamian in the seventh century, when Buddhist influence was already beginning to decline.



Copyright X.G.S.

CAVES AT BAMIAN, AFGHANISTAN, IMPORTANT BUDDHIST SANCTUARY OF THE V-VII CENTURY

In the same cliff face, about 1,000 feet from each other, were two colossal statues of Buddha, one 175 and the other 114 feet high. Each was in an enormous niche hewn out of the rock. They were known to Hsuan Ts'ang, who described the larger Buddha as a bronze statue, because its original coat of plaster was gilt.

Led by Hackin, we climbed up a slope to the caves. Here, unlike the Egyptians in Cairo, or the Crusaders in Syria, the thousands of Buddhist monks who laboured at this spot from the second and the sixth centuries had followed no definite plan in their work ; and the result was an expression of fervent and unregulated faith rather than an attempt at a harmonious effort. Without skilled artisans, slaves, engineering knowledge or plant, they had toiled with their bare hands and so had been compelled to choose the softest rock. Inspired by religious zeal alone, they were not concerned with the elegance or the beauty of what they created, and had not even troubled to carry away the debris—which they had thrown outside the caves. The niches for the statues were hewn out very crudely, with apparently one aim only—to reveal the form of the Blessed One.

When we were all collected on the head of the larger Buddha, Iacovleff started to copy the frescoes that still remained on the intrados of the vault, all of which had been wantonly damaged. This iconoclasm was the work of the Muhammadans, for whom any representation of a divine or human form is an impiety. The legs of the Buddha on which we stood were used by Nadir Shah and Aurangzeb as artillery targets. To destroy the mural paintings they coated them with tar and then set light to them. There is no record of how many were destroyed. Fanatics still shoot at the statues with their rifles.

Such was Bamian, where the Expedition arrived after two and a half months of travel—a sort of cross-roads in

the history of humanity, where formerly Greece, India and Sassanid Persia met. There, to the creative impulse which Rome had given to the world, the Orient had added the expression of its own philosophy—of contemplation, and dreams of the Infinite. For us, so recently from the West, who so far had seen only the Islamised face of the East, the pilgrimage to this silent valley in the fastness of the Hindu Kush was not in vain, for it gave us the occasion for contemplation and meditation on the symbol of FAITH and LOVE deposited there by Time, the last and living traces of three past and gone civilisations.

CHAPTER IV

THE BRITISH WELCOME

Dakka—British welcome at the Khyber—India—Kashmir—Disquieting news from Point—Formation of Three Parties for the passage of the mountains.

ON THE 15TH JUNE, when we were about a hundred miles from the Indian frontier, we received two wireless messages from China—still via Beirut. The first, undated, from Peilingmiao, said : “ Chinese scientists arrived. Did not expect so many.” In the second, dated the 3rd June, Point gave his geographical position as Lat. 42° N. ; Long. $104^{\circ} 30'$ E. A simple calculation shewed that if twelve days earlier the China Group had been—as this implied—in the middle of the Gobi Desert, two stages east of Khara Khoja, and a short distance from the Etsin Gol River, and had been able to maintain its rate of advance, it should by the 15th have passed Suchow and be nearing Sinkiang. As the crow flies, it was, therefore, only 1,600 miles from us—no more than twelve hours’ journey in a fast aeroplane.

After leaving Kabul we travelled south for sixty miles, following gorges which cut deep through the rugged mountains, and gradually descended down to the Jalalabad Valley, where we saw our first sugar-cane plantations and felt for the first time the hot breath of the plains of India.

Journeying in the opposite direction we met large caravans of tribesmen escaping from the dreadful heat to the cooler uplands of the north. It was noticeable that only

the aged and the very young were on camels, and that the men were on foot—while the women followed behind as best they could. When they met infidels such as ourselves, these pure-blooded Afghans spat upon the ground. These were the people who fifty years earlier had annihilated a British force in these same wild gorges, sparing, so the story goes, the life of one officer to tell the tale. Four times a year they make the trip between Afghanistan and India—a migration which is essential for the economic life of the country.

We dropped down 3,000 feet in eight hours, and found ourselves in the Jalalabad basin, the horizon aflame and the air like a furnace. As we struggled on, the heat grew worse until at 5 p.m. the thermometer registered 46°. The sun was veiled by an opaque haze some time before it set, but its power did not diminish. The mechanics, who had been at the wheel since early morning—for twelve hours without a break—drove on with set teeth, silent, half-naked, and caked with dust. When the mercury climbed to 50° the petrol began to vaporise in the pipes and the engines to pull badly. Under these conditions we dragged on as far as Dakka, where our thirst was only aggravated by the sight of the muddy river sluggishly flowing at the bottom of an immense zinc-coloured basin. But, trying as the day had been, the night was worse, for the baked rocks then gave out their stored-up heat, and the sand-flies, against which our curtains were useless, continued to draw blood until dawn. Then, exhausted by lack of sleep, we fell into a short fevered doze until aroused by the reveille at 4 a.m.

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“GO SLOWLY. SPEED LIMIT FIVE MILES
AN HOUR THROUGH THE CANTONMENT.”

Crossing the shadow of this warning, which lay athwart the road—suddenly transformed into an excellent



Ph. Morizet, copyright E.C.C.A.

THE GREAT BUDDHA AT BAMIAN (AFGHANISTAN)

macadamised highway—we entered British India. On the right stood an officer in khaki, who saluted, introduced himself as Captain Rogers and offered us refreshments. On the left was a small rectangular fort surrounded by barbed wire—the post of Landi Khana. A few hundred feet farther on was the terminus of the railway, where a Ghurka guard turned out and presented arms. The men were in blue shirts, black belts and felt hats cocked up on one side. The sudden appearance of traffic signs, the change in the nature of the road, the immaculate turn-out of the troops, and lastly the cordial reception given us—acted as a tonic.

Over drinks at the little Mess, Captain Rogers conveyed to us an invitation to luncheon at Landi Kotal from General Sandeman¹—the brigadier in command of the troops—who had been prevented from coming to greet us personally. He also informed us that warning of our visit had been given by Colonel Gabriel, who had recently arrived in India from London to assist in the arrangements being made by the Indian Government for our passage through British India and across the Himalayas. Colonel Gabriel, it appeared, was close by, within telephone call.² This was cheerful news, particularly to Haardt. We were all delighted to find ourselves so suddenly in this atmosphere of genuine friendliness, established order, and the amenities of modern life. Moreover, after all the circumlocution and exchange of elaborate compliments to which we had been subjected for so long, the old familiar method of conversation, with its direct question and answer, came as a relief. Verily it was civilisation once again! Here were armchairs, punkahs and all the latest English papers. Williams had just time to glance at a copy of the *Polo Magazine*, not more than two weeks old—when Colonel Gabriel appeared. After mutual greetings we again

¹ Brigadier-General D. G. Sandeman, D.S.O.

² Colonel E. V. Gabriel, C.S.I., C.M.G., C.V.O., C.B.E.

started off for the five-mile run over a properly graded and curved road, with concrete ditches, traffic-signs and girder bridges, to Landi Kotal.

At the sunbaked entrance of Landi Kotal Fort—a place which had seen much hard fighting—we were received by General Sandeman and his staff, and the officers commanding a battalion of the famous Gordon Highlanders and Rattray's Sikhs. At the gateway the guard of the Gordons presented arms, and we were then received by a full guard of honour of the Sikhs, with their regimental band. Once more we were in the midst of tradition, established authority and all those fundamental conceptions of the Western world, which to us, at this moment, were especially attractive. Passing on into the cantonment, we found the pipes and drums of the Highlanders paraded in our honour. Fifty pairs of knees rhythmically lifted kilt and sporran as these stalwarts in spiked sun-helmets and short white jackets, heads back and chests out, with the particular lilt and swagger for which they are famous, moved to every signal of the drum-major. Their music had not the wild voluptuous frenzy of that of the Afghans, but was a more restrained manifestation of disciplined warlike force, slightly sentimental because it brought to this grim and barren spot memories of far-off highlands, and must have made the performers long for the lochs and cool mists of their own country as much as did the stifling breath of the monsoon. The music ceased abruptly, and the big drummer came up to us. Against the leopard-skin covering his chest he carried the large yellow drum on which we read names that thrilled—*Le Cateau, Fère-en-Tardenois, Béthune*.

Our welcome was cemented at luncheon, when some of us were entertained in the brigade officers' Mess, and others in the Messes of the officers and sergeants of the Gordons. The walls of the Mess-room of the latter regiment were decorated with engravings and the heads of big game,

and above three polo cups and a sword presented by the Maharajah of Jammu and Kashmir hung the first flag hoisted on the walls of Delhi sixty-four years earlier.

After lunch, when farewell toasts had been drunk, we gave an exhibition of the climbing powers of the cars on a small, very steep hill crowned with a blockhouse, and then again took the road for Peshawur. At Shagai, a sturdy modern fort, the Commandant of the Second Sector gave us tea and entertained us with a display by his Rajput soldiers in the excellent swimming pool in the centre of the square—the last thing that one would have expected to find in the arid drabness of the place. At Jamrud—the nearest outpost of the Khyber to Peshawur—the Commandant of the Third Sector hospitably insisted on our stopping for more light refreshment. And in this pleasant manner, thanks to our British friends, were thrown open to us the gates of the Khyber Pass, which closes the entrance to Northern India.

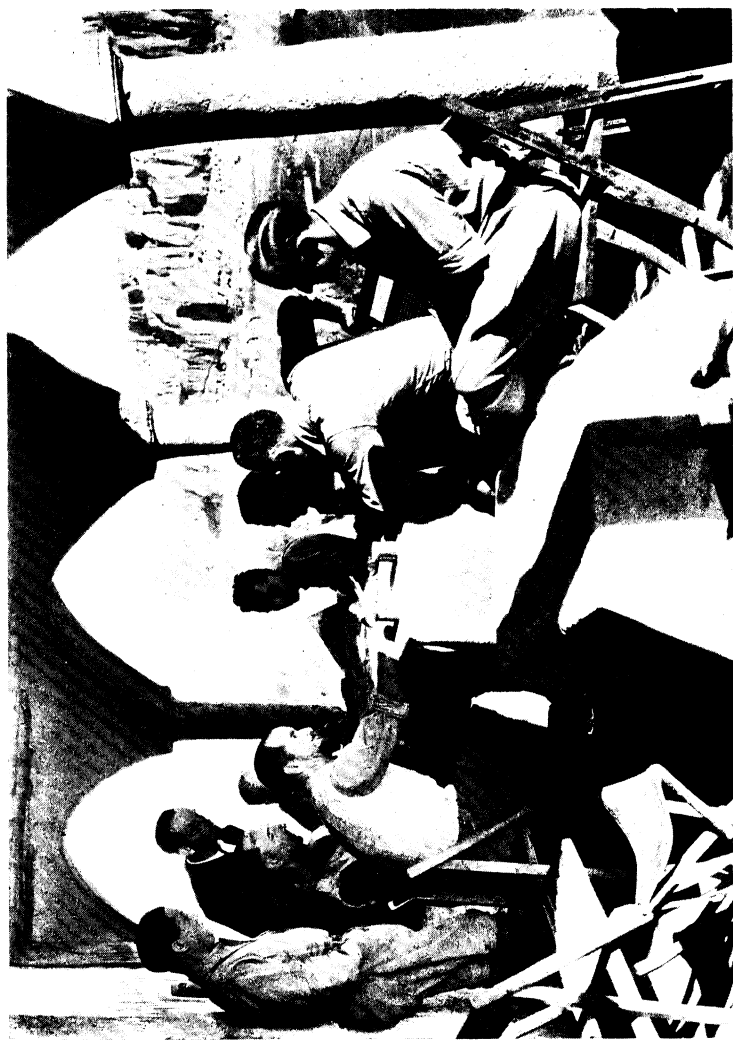
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When we left Jamrud night was already falling, an hour after which all traffic in the pass ceased, and sentries fired without challenge. The road, which was open from seven in the morning until seven at night, then became a zone of death, where warfare was carried on unremittingly—if stealthily. The rugged crests of the hills provided excellent positions and cover for the snipers from which to shoot with deadly accuracy at those down below. In fact, the evening before our arrival a soldier had been killed by a bullet through the forehead as he sat smoking on a verandah. When we reached the gate of Peshawur cantonment, which was surrounded by defences against sudden attack, it had been closed for the night. The sentries were inexorable in refusing us entrance, and it was only after an hour's explanation and much telephoning on the part of Colonel

Gabriel that we were admitted and were able to enter and enjoy the comforts of Peshawur's best hotel, where everything had been arranged for our arrival.

Next day was spent in official calls and receptions, our technical needs being catered for by the Royal Air Force, which placed at our disposal its workshops and engineering resources of every kind. We were bombarded with questions, everyone being eager to know if we had come all the way from Herat and Kandahar without being interfered with, and if we had seen any of the fighting in the Usbeg country. But with the grim portcullis of the Khyber behind us we felt that we were in another world, and Afghanistan was already only a memory. In the evening we witnessed a wild dance by the Afridis of the Khyber Rifles, which was arranged for us by the Political Officer. On the following day the gate of the cantonment was specially opened for our departure at 3 a.m. after a ceremonious challenge of almost mediæval character, and we set out across the Punjab, travelling by night and resting by day on account of the intense heat. We crossed the River Indus by the great defensive bridge at Attock, where we were much impressed by the precautions taken before we were allowed to pass. A small detachment left the main body to visit the marvellous excavations and archæological museum at Mahendro Jaro, which place lay some three miles off our course.

Then, after one very hot night spent at the hotel in Rawalpindi, we took fresh supplies on board and again made an early start, crossing the last stretch of the plains and beginning our climb up the foothills to the hill station of Murree, where we lunched in coolness at a height of 7,000 feet. Then we traversed a very steep hillside over the Murree Pass, from which we got a splendid panoramic view of the highest Himalayas right down to the level of the Jhelum River at Kohala, the boundary of the Kashmir State.



HACKIN'S WORK-ROOM AT BAMIAN

From left to right : Le Fèvre, Pecqueur, Haardt, Jacovleff, Jourdan, Sauvage, Williams and de Vassoigne

Ph. Monard, copyright E.C.C.A.

The night was passed at one of the little guest-houses provided along the road by the Kashmir Government, where our alfresco meal aroused much interest amongst the natives gathered on the bank of the rushing river. Next morning, June 24th, we continued up the valley, with its profusion of flowers and occasional examples of ancient Hindu architecture, to Baramulla—the entrance to the Vale of Kashmir itself. From here onwards for thirty miles we travelled along the best of roads shaded by an avenue of giant poplars to Srinagar, where we were met about 6 p.m. by an official deputation from the State. As we drove through the residential quarter of the city, it seemed as if the whole population had turned out to watch our arrival. Our camp was in the Munshi Bagh, an ideal spot from which the whole circle of mountains surrounding the Vale of Kashmir could be seen. Here we were welcomed by the British Resident and other officials.

The Maharajah of Jammu and Kashmir had graciously invited the members of the Expedition to be his guests during their stay in his capital, and we found prepared for our reception and complete in every detail for our comfort a magnificent camp pitched on a lawn under a grove of plane trees at least 100 years old. In addition to two of the Maharajah's own perfectly appointed house-boats moored alongside the camp there were fifteen luxurious double-fly tents, fitted with shower-baths and electric light. To wait on us there was a staff of fifty servants, impressive in their scarlet turbans. During the whole of our stay we were entertained in the most hospitable manner and received the greatest assistance and encouragement from the British Resident, His Highness the Maharajah Sir Hari Singh, and the high officers of State.

Srinagar, the "Venice of India," more than 5,000 feet above the sea, with its house-boats and *shikaras*¹ is renowned

¹ Small native boats.

as a pleasure resort for British officers and officials in India. In addition to polo, golf, tennis, dancing and the social life it offers, it is the base for those who come up for shooting and fishing expeditions—the two sports for which the country is famous. But for us, Srinagar, in spite of its attractions, merely represented the starting point for our journey across the Himalayas—a feeling which was strengthened by the sight of the store of food and equipment, from steel hawsers to tubes of oxygen, sent out to us from Paris via Bombay and Lahore, which now lay stacked at one side of the camp.

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From Afghanistan to Tibet stretches a succession of mountain chains—the Himalayas, the Hindu Kush and the Karakoram, which include the highest mountains in the world, and separate the two civilisations of India and China. They can be crossed by three routes : to the north of Peshawur in the Chitral region, by the Burzil Pass which connects India with the Wakhjir Pass and Chinese Turkestan : three hundred miles to the east by the Leh road which debouches into Sinkiang south of Yarkand : and lastly, between these two, by the route via Gilgit, which starts not far from Srinagar. Colonel Gabriel had considered all three ways. The Chitral road, a purely strategic route which involved crossing an outlying portion of Afghanistan, was barred by the Government of India to all travellers whether British or foreign. The Leh Treaty road, often used in the summer by caravans, was long and difficult by reason of its three passes of over 18,000 feet in height. There remained the Gilgit road. And this was the route selected for our further advance ; though it was doubtful whether we could take our track-machines along it.

This path, which had been widened and dignified by the

name of road after the Hunza and Nagar campaign at the end of last century, was in fact no more than a narrow pack-trail, in some places five feet and in others barely one foot wide. A "mere knife scratch on the face of Nature," it clung precariously to the sides of cliffs, overhung precipices and descended deep down into the valleys before climbing up to the passes, 16,000 feet high, which connect the basins of the Indus and Tarim Rivers. This route, which is closed for eight months of the year, had just been opened for the season and was scarcely practicable yet either for foot passengers or horses. By it the journey to Kashgar was estimated to take forty-five days. Haardt was already aware of most of these difficulties, the existence of which was confirmed not only by Colonel Gabriel but also by Captain Waddington,¹ who had been in Srinagar for some time in connection with the transport arrangements and for the purpose of collecting information. He reported that in Srinagar opinion was unanimous that the track-cars would not be able to go farther than the second march from that place.

But, assuming that this was correct, the problem of crossing the mountains still presented serious difficulties to a party of the size of the Expedition, for a forty-five days' journey at those altitudes called for a minimum weight of 1,000 lbs. of baggage for each European attempting it (food, warm clothing, camp and other equipment), and on this scale Haardt's party, consisting as it did, of twenty-three Europeans, would require over ten tons of baggage. To take this load necessitated 400 men or 200 pack-horses,² not counting the saddle-horses and extra ponies needed to carry cameras, scientific instruments, etc. If the cars were to attempt to make the journey, these figures would have to be

¹ Captain J. Waddington of the French Cavalry had gone out to India to study the question of the return journey originally proposed for the Expedition from Indo-China to Arabia via Siam, Burmah, Northern India and Baluchistan.

² A coolie can carry a maximum load of 60 lbs. and a pack-horse 120.

doubled, to include spare parts, cables, and special equipment. As the local resources in the few mountain villages along the road were not sufficient to supply food and forage for such a number of coolies and animals, additional supplies would have to be sent ahead. It was for this reason that the number of Europeans permitted to cross the mountains in one party was by Government regulation limited to five. The only possible solution for the Expedition seemed to be to divide up into four parties, which could start at intervals of eight days. This would result in the fourth party reaching Kashgar twenty-four days after the first one.

Before settling the question, Haardt decided that he and Gabriel would reconnoitre ahead on horseback to investigate conditions on the spot.

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“ FPCF from FXI Beirut Radio from Point’s Mission. N.R. 18 Arrived Hami yesterday June 25th stop Passed through severe battle between Chinese troops and Muhammadan rebels stop Left Petro alone at Hami with a damaged lorry stop As soon as it is repaired he will join us in Kashgar stop Grave Muhammadan rebellion makes progress difficult stop V. Point.”

This disquieting message was handed to the leader of the Expedition on the 29th June, when he returned from his reconnaissance of the first stages of the journey beyond Srinagar. There was also a cable from the National Geographic Society in Washington, to inform him confidentially that two Chinese scientists had left Point’s Group and that serious difficulties would probably be raised in the way of the Pamir Group entering Chinese territory.

“ Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,” was Williams’s philosophical remark to this. It was good advice,

¹ Point’s wireless messages had been picked up by many amateur wireless stations in the United States.

because the Pamir Group was already faced with sufficient difficulties of its own—gradients of over 40%, narrow hair-pin bends, unsuitability or total absence of bridges, and a road which was no more than a track as well as being too narrow. Ferracci was confident that we should get through, and could be relied on to take the cars as far as possible. But, although the special design of the latter permitted almost acrobatic manoeuvres, it was not possible for them to pass along a shelf which was, in certain places, much narrower than they themselves.

By noon of the 29th everything had been thought out, and it was finally decided that there should be three parties starting at intervals of eight days.

Party "A," composed of Hackin, Iacovleff and Sivel, was to leave Srinagar on the 2nd July. To it was to be attached a mobile labour gang under de Vassoigne.

Party "B," the most important, was to start under Haardt's personal leadership on the 12th July. It comprised Pecqueur, Williams, Jourdan, Gauffreteau and the four mechanics whom Ferracci had chosen for the trial demonstration of the two track-cars.

Colonel Gabriel also joined this party. He proved to be a staunch friend and a wise counsellor. It was partly owing to his influence and representations that the Earl of Willingdon, the Viceroy and Governor-General of India, took such interest in the Expedition, with the result that it was most courteously allowed by the Kashmir authorities to make use of the Gilgit road, which is usually closed to all travellers whether British or foreign.

Party "C," consisting of Sauvage, Laplanche and myself, under the command of Audouin-Dubreuil, was to be the last to leave—on or about the 20th July. Its rôle was to maintain a liaison between all the parties and the base camp, a portable wireless being included in its equipment.

Goerger was to remain at Srinagar in charge of the base

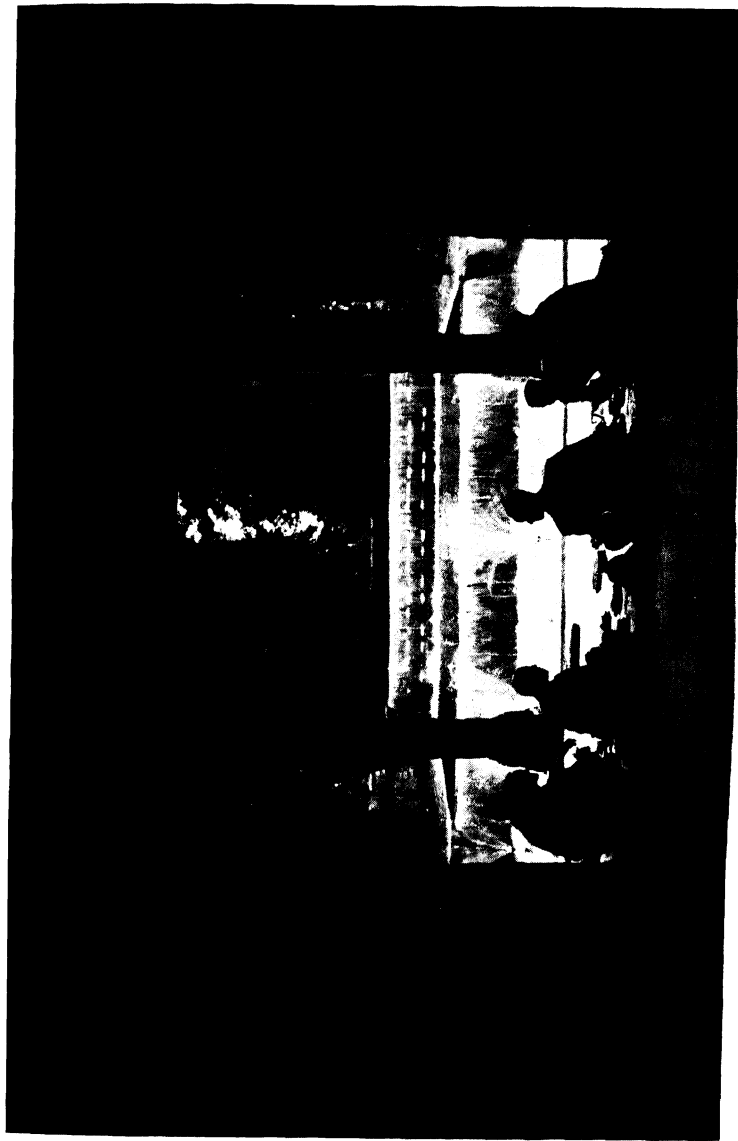
camp, to maintain contact with the China Group and to evacuate the remaining five cars and the personnel who were returning to France. As soon as the Pamir Group had reached Kashgar, but not before, he was to return to Paris and then go to Peking, there to await the arrival of the Expedition. The successive departures were so arranged that the second party could use the porters and animals sent back by the first, and the third those sent back by the second.

The equipment had to be supplemented and adapted to the particular requirements of the journey. Baggage was cut down to a minimum—600 lbs. per person, which included food supplies, camp equipment, warm clothing and scientific instruments. Every item had to be considered from the point of view of weight and volume, as it had to be carried in *yakdans*.¹ The reserve food supplies, camp equipment for high altitudes, cine-cameras, wireless, films, plates, spare parts, repair tools, surgical instruments and medicines had to be redistributed between the three parties and then packed anew.

The drudgery of these preparations at Srinagar was relieved by the many social functions which were so kindly arranged for us. The Maharajah gave a large luncheon under the giant chenar trees of his pleasant country palace ; and the British Resident entertained us at a reception and tea in the world-famed Shalimar Garden—the impressive setting of the ancient dwelling of the Great Mogul. Finally their Highnesses gave a gala *soirée*.

By the end of June all was ready for the departure of the first party, and on the 2nd July it set out. At this moment all was going well, the only disturbing element being the

¹ Locally made leather-covered mule trunks, specially adapted for transport by pack animals.



Ph. Morizet, copyright E.C.C.A.

IN AN ANCIENT MOGUL PALACE, SRINAGAR

Left to right : Sauvage, de Vassoigne, Audouin-Dubreuil, Haardt, Waddington and Pecqueur

uncertainty about Point's situation. On the evening of the 3rd it began to rain, and continued to do so for the whole of the next three days. The mountains disappeared in a thick screen of clouds. The river rose. Goerger in his tent found himself splashing about in a sewer and betook himself and his papers to a boat. Hackin telegraphed that he had been obliged to halt after marching for three days. On the 7th, about 10 a.m., there was a short break in the rain. Though the camp was surrounded by an embankment, we were forced, as the river continued to rise, to move with all our belongings to higher ground a mile along the road.

On the 8th the rain again stopped, but the Jhelum still rose, and logs and dead animals were carried down by the flood. The British Agent at Gilgit telegraphed to say that the road had been washed away in several places. Next day the downpour started again, and Haardt received several warnings advising him to give up the idea of taking any cars and to proceed on horseback if he wished to avoid failure. Two days later Hackin wired that he had got across the Burzil Pass (13,775 feet) with the greatest difficulty, the snow being twenty feet in depth. On the following day the sky cleared once more. The second party was now ready to start, and the pack-animals and porters of the first party sent back by Hackin were waiting at Bandipur. Rumours reached us of some trouble amongst the population of Srinagar.

On the evening of the 12th, so as to avoid any delay on the morrow, three boatloads of baggage were sent down the Jhelum to Bandipur, where the Gilgit road begins to climb up from the river. The two cars were without trailers. As the first march was easy, it was decided that they should go on so as to reach Tragbal before the night of the 13th. The "Golden Scarab" was to be driven by Cécillon and Corset, and the "Silver Crescent" (Audouin-Dubreuil's car) by Normand.

Although three and a half months had passed since our departure from Beirut and we had travelled some 3,500 miles through Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia and Afghanistan, it was here at Bandipur that the difficult part of our journey, with its mystery, solitude and hardships, really began.

The coolies and animals marched off up the winding trail which disappeared amongst the trees. They were followed by Williams, Jourdan, Morizet; then by Pecqueur and Gabriel. Haardt brought up the rear. Shaking hands with Goerger, who had come to Bandipur to see him off, he mounted his pony and joined the others. He fully realised the seriousness of what he was attempting. Return would mean defeat.

That same evening events of unexpected gravity occurred in Srinagar. A communal riot broke out, and excited Mussulmans began to loot the shops of the Hindus. The police had to use machine guns to quell the riot, and several people were killed. Martial law was proclaimed, all assemblies being forbidden and Europeans being requested to be indoors by 10 p.m.

On the 20th, Audouin-Dubreuil and his three companions in their turn set out to cross the mountains; and it was hoped that their portable wireless set might enable them to pick up some message from Point, whose prolonged silence was most disquieting. For twenty-two days there had been no communication between the Pamir and China Groups.

CHAPTER V

UNDER THE SPELL OF THE BLACK DRAGON

The Nankow Pass—Kalgan—Gombo, the Mongol guide—Arrival at Peilingmiao.

MEANWHILE, things had not been going too well with the China Group during the three months which had elapsed since it set out westwards—two days after Haardt had bidden farewell to the Mediterranean. By the time it left Tientsin on the 6th April many difficulties had already cropped up. The vernacular Press had shewn itself hostile ; the detachment of Chinese scientists—which should have joined the Group—had not made its appearance ; and the Governor-General of Sinkiang had sent a warning that the Expedition might be attacked by bandits on the Kansu-Sinkiang frontier, and that in his opinion its projected journey was too dangerous and should be abandoned. Hardly an auspicious beginning !

A halt was made the first night at the Temple of the Black Dragon at Hei-lung-t'ang, a few miles beyond Peking. Resting here after the day's journey, Point found himself a prey to grave anxieties. As he sat by the edge of the temple pool, pondering this accumulation of unpropitious factors, his eye was caught by a number of copper coins gleaming through the emerald-hued water. The aged custodian of the temple in reply to a question explained that Hei-lung-t'ang was the first halting place on the

way from Peking to the Sacred Mountain—Miao-feng-shan—and that passing pilgrims often threw a coin into the water to ensure the success of their pious undertaking. Point followed their example. In the circumstances he felt that it might not be entirely superfluous for him also to invoke the protection of the Black Dragon !

The god's influence, however, did not at first seem to be very efficacious, for the following day brought a series of disasters. Shortly after the start one of the lorries crashed through the rotten timbers of an old bridge and narrowly escaped total destruction. Not an hour later Point was recalled to Peking by an urgent message. A fresh Press campaign had been launched, accusing the Frenchmen of having crossed the city without flying the Chinese flag, and the Federation of Chinese Scientific Associations was using this as a pretext to re-open the whole question of sanction for the journey. Then, some six miles farther on, for no apparent reason, the track-bands began to break ; and before the end of the day fourteen bands—the whole of the reserve stock for the journey of 8,000 miles to Kashgar and back—had been rendered useless. It was, indeed, with the greatest difficulty that the cars managed to reach Lung Hu Tai, a small village near Nankow, at the foot of the famous Pass. After much investigation Brull discovered that the breakages were due to the violent stresses set up in the rubber by some fault in the design of the idle pulleys.

Fortunately, the fault was one which could be rectified in Peking. But even so it was obviously unwise to set out into the desert without a fresh stock of spare bands, so a cable asking for these was sent immediately to André Citroën in Paris. During the three days required for the repairs Point continued his negotiations with the Authorities, and succeeded in meeting all the objections raised, with the result that he obtained permission to resume the

journey. It was now settled that the scientists should join the party at Kalgan.

Peking lies at the edge of the alluvial plain which borders the Gulf of Chihli, and rises on the north-west by two successive terraces—the Nankow and Kalgan Passes—up to the Mongolian Plateau. Though the distances between Peking and Nankow, and Nankow and Kalgan are not great, the road to those points had the reputation of being one of the most difficult for motoring in the whole of northern China. The ancient highway, originally hewn out of the solid rock, has suffered a fate similar to that of the other great engineering works—roads, canals and bridges—created by the Emperors, and is now but a crumbling memorial to its former glory. As a matter of fact, the unanimous opinion of all the foreigners who were in the habit of motoring in the vicinity of Peking was that once the Nankow Pass was negotiated, the remainder of the journey to Kashgar would be comparatively plain sailing.

By eight on the morning of the 11th the cars now again in running order began a steady thirteen-mile climb up a road blocked by large loose stones and winding between bare rugged hills which became steeper and steeper. Crawling up the narrow defile—at first in second, and then in bottom gear—the whole cortège progressed, with sudden jerks, at an average rate of only two miles an hour—though the speed was immaterial as long as the cars continued to move. Except for several minor troubles, which were put right immediately, the bands held well, their metal shoes squeaking as they scraped the rocks. By noon six miles had been covered, and an hour later the head of the procession came to a thick wall pierced by a marble gate. This was Chu-yung-kuan, which, according to the ancient Chinese saying, forms the boundary of the Middle Kingdom, outside which lies the Land of the Barbarians.

Then began anew the struggle of the machines versus the
Ho

rocks, between which a few sure-footed and heavily laden donkeys and mules occasionally threaded their way. The boulders had to be broken up, levered to one side, or rolled over the cliff edge, which proved a laborious task. About five in the afternoon loomed up the crenelations of one of the four or five minor walls along the frontier. When nightfall came a further eleven miles had been covered. Next morning, about ten, on rounding an enormous mass of rock after a last climb at a grade of one in four up a narrow slippery stone pass, there appeared a gateway—the Pa Ta Ling, or “ Gate of Eight Peaks,” a guard-court, and then another gate—“ The North Gate, the Key of the Universe.” This was the Great Wall of China, which starts at Shanhaikwan and ends beyond Suchow.

As far as the eye could reach it ran up hill and down dale, and was an impressive example of the military art created by men who knew how to exploit strong points and to strengthen weaker ones. For 3,000 miles it formed a continuous rampart flanked by watch-towers within bow-shot or calling distance of each other and protected against the irruption of the Tartar hordes by a deep ditch along the front.

Though progress was on the down-grade once the Pass was crossed, minor troubles did not cease. At one place a railway bridge was so low that the road had to be excavated before the cars could pass underneath. After the experience near Hei-lung-t'ang over-bridges were naturally avoided, and as a result one of the two lorries was bogged in the bed of a river. Then at another place the Chinese navvies engaged in widening the railway refused to stop blasting, and the procession had to run the gauntlet of a shower of rocks. But without further mishap the China Group came eventually to Kalgan.

“ The Pioneer's Inn ” at Kalgan, now the Expedition's headquarters, was an abandoned foreign “ hotel ” which



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THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA

had seen its palmiest days just after the Great War ended, in that happy period when Outer Mongolia was still open for international trade. At that time numbers of motor-cars were running between Kalgan and Urga in competition with the camel caravans. The six hundred miles' trek across the desert, in the coldest weather, without supplies, was no child's play ; but those who risked it made a small fortune each trip by trading in furs. Much gold had then changed hands in the Pioneer Inn, where adventurers of many nations, each swearing in his native tongue, had not seldom settled their disputes with knife and revolver. Now that the Soviet Government had closed the frontier of Outer Mongolia against all trade with China, Kalgan had lost its importance and had relapsed into a mere caravan halt.

On the 24th April anxiety as to the track-bands was allayed by the receipt of a cable from Paris : " Am to-day sending Berger with thirty new track-bands to Kalgan via Siberia. André Citroën." Meanwhile, Point was much perturbed at being no farther on than Kalgan, where he was forced to await the arrival of the Chinese Scientists. But there was nothing for it but to possess his soul in patience, as Dr. Tsu Ming-yi—the chief of the delegation—had sent word that he and his colleagues could not start before the 15th May.

The monotony of the wait was relieved by a reception and gala luncheon given by the Governor. This was attended by all the members of the Expedition, and there was much introducing, bowing and smiling, and many polite and apparently innocent questions as to whether the Frenchmen had official permission to enter Sinkiang ; whether they proposed to use the wireless ; and whether they were armed against attack by bandits. This cordial official welcome might have been taken as proof of the friendly attitude of the Chinese had not Point forty-eight

hours afterwards again been summoned back to Peking. The departure of the Expedition had once more been vetoed—not on account of any action on the part of the Kalgan officials, but owing to the opposition of the Federation of Chinese Scientific Associations and of the Kuomintang. The newspapers, after having given out as a reason for this that the Expedition had passed through the city surreptitiously without flying the Chinese flag—with the intention of leaving the scientists behind—now accused it of having destroyed bridges on its way, of having communicated by wireless with the French Far East Naval Squadron, and of having secretly filmed in Kalgan military reviews, opium-dens and women with bound feet. These, of course, were mere pretexts.

Point went patiently into each of these accusations one by one, and showed them to be false. For example, the moving pictures, taken the day after the arrival at Kalgan, were “shot” at a military gymkhana at the personal request of the Governor ; the damage accidentally done to the bridge by the lorry had been paid for ; certain photographs showing the cars flying only the tricolour had been taken in France—actually at Fontainebleau—etc., etc. He was continually on the move between Peking and Kalgan, arguing, apologising, promising, persevering, until finally he succeeded in obtaining the desired permission for the Expedition to proceed.

Meanwhile, at Kalgan, the days passed slowly. All spent their time putting finishing touches to the arrangements which had been interrupted by the hurried departure from Tientsin. Brull adjusted the dynamos of the wireless, Reymond practised surveying, and the mechanics tuned up and tinkered with the cars. Petro, when not occupied by questions of *huchao*¹ and *likin*,² in which direction he had already succeeded in saving 60,000 dollars

¹ Passports.

² Taxes.

unnecessary expense, was busy working out a reconnaissance trip and making an estimate of the amount of petrol and oil which would be required for an auxiliary depot in the Gobi Desert west of Peilingmiao—the first stop after Kalgan on the Mongolian Plateau. In the evenings some of the men played *belote*, others bridge. Brull amused himself by solving abstruse mathematical problems, or having long discussions with Father Teilhard de Chardin¹ as to the moral value of scientific research and the question of evolution. Raymond, on returning tired out by long hunts for beetles, which he housed in glass jars under his bed, had the bright idea of breeding scorpions—only on a small scale, so he reassured his room-mate, Piat.

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Late in the evening of the 11th May a rickshaw pulled up in front of the inn, and out of it stepped someone who stumbled over a tent-rope and proceeded to grope his way forward in the dark, calling out in a tentative voice, "Maurice?" It was Berger, who had left Paris with the new track-bands only fourteen days earlier and had reached Peking the previous night after travelling via Moscow, across Siberia, to Harbin. The thirty cases, each six feet long, were at the railway station. They had travelled in the luggage van as personal baggage, and Berger had in consequence hardly slept during the whole journey, for he had felt compelled to get out of the train at every important station to see that the van was not left behind.

With the new track-bands and re-adjusted pulleys it should be possible to go to the ends of the earth! Twenty-four hours were needed to put them on, and then forward! Berger had saved the situation; and it was amazing that

¹ Father Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., the eminent geologist, joined the Expedition at Kalgan the 12th May

a man who had never been outside Paris and could not speak a word of Russian or Chinese should have been able to accomplish such a feat. Much to the joy of all, he also brought letters from France.

Two days later Petro and Chauvet left for Peilingmiao with two lorries. They were accompanied by Father Teilhard and Reymond, who decided to take advantage of this reconnaissance to begin their own work in Mongolia. The others could not move on, for the scientists had not yet arrived. On the 15th Dr. Tsu Ming-yi made his appearance and announced that the rest of the members might be expected in a few days.

"I am starting now. We have already waited too long, they can catch us up at Peilingmiao," was Point's rejoinder.

Finally, on the 16th, after a delay of twenty days, the main body set out for the Mongolian Plateau, to reach which it was necessary to climb up the last step of the Giant's Stairway—the Wanchuen Pass. The road, which had been constructed some eight years earlier, was both bad and steep, ascending 3,000 feet in a distance of eight miles.

Once on top of the Pass, at an altitude of almost 5,000 feet, everyone breathed more freely, for most of the petty troubles now seemed to be over. But there remained one more potential obstacle in the Governor of the next Chinese city, Chang-pei-hsien, who only two years before had been a notorious bandit—known as "The Wild Cat," because he was generally credited with being able to see in the dark. Point had considerable misgivings as to the nature of the reception to be expected from him. But on arrival at Chang-pei-hsien the Expedition found Marshal Chang Hsueh-liang—to give him his correct name and title—very polite and friendly. The road was free, and the party proceeded on its way.

When the last signs of cultivation had been left behind



Ph. Specht, copyright E.C.C.-A.

FILMING SPORTS AT KALGAN AT THE REQUEST OF THE GOVERNOR

there seemed nothing on all sides but sky and earth. Spring in the lowlands had been succeeded by winter on the plateau ; and an icy wind from the Arctic Circle drove the dry snow in clouds from the white hills.

After miles of bare steppe, Serben—the first Mongol encampment—was reached. There, standing in front of a *yurt*,¹ was a man who seemed to be waiting for the cars. He was dressed in a long tightly belted coat, and wore a yellow pointed cap with fox-skin flaps tied under his chin. A smile wrinkled his face, lifting up the skin on his cheek-bones, and through his lashes his eyes twinkled with a questioning but slightly suspicious glance. He was holding a piece of paper which he handed to Point. On it was written in Petro's hand-writing : " Gombo. Excellent Mongol guide. Speaks Chinese. Most useful for the passage of the Gobi."

As the man made signs for him to enter, Point lifted the felt curtain of the *yurt* and went in, leaving his arms outside, in accordance with the custom of the country. In the centre of the *yurt* a brazier burning dried camel-dung gave out a pleasant heat, the smoke finding its way out through an opening in the roof. And when his eyes became accustomed to the semi-darkness, he saw an old woman squatting near the fire watching some brew in an iron cauldron. It was Gombo's mother. As the foreigner did not produce the birch cup always carried in their girdles by the Mongols, the hostess very ceremoniously handed him her own, politely licking it clean before she filled it with the salted and buttered tea usually offered on such occasions. The three looked at each other, and, though they had no language in common, felt that they were in sympathy. When Point produced Petro's note the old " body " got up and took a square of blue silk from the family altar, on which stood three small statues of Buddha. This she gave to her son,

¹ Mongol tent of felt,

who lifted it to his lips and offered it to Point. The pact was sealed. Gombo had joined the Expedition as official guide.

Next morning the snow had melted and patches of green grass shewed on every side, toning down the austerity of the landscape, which unfolded itself in long rolling billows to the distant horizon. The cars now made good progress—seventy-five miles on the first day and ninety on the second—despite the many “nigger heads” (those stiff little clumps of furze) so deadly to car-springs. Everywhere huge herds of gazelle grazed peacefully, but when Point tried to approach them in a lorry, the graceful animals scattered and disappeared at a speed of over forty miles an hour. Numbers of Mongol ponies kept pace with the cars, galloping freely over the steppe, nostrils dilated and manes flying in the wind. They looked wild, but actually they were animals out at grass, each branded with a number. There are no horse thieves in Mongolia. Though the country is vast, and sparsely populated and the arrival of a stranger at the cross-roads or water-holes is a rare occurrence, the news of it spreads rapidly, and a horse thief would not have a chance of escape. On one occasion, as a flight of brightly coloured ducks passed overhead, Point raised his gun, but he at once lowered it on a sign from Gombo, who explained that ducks were the “lamas” among birds, and that it was a crime to kill one, lest it should be a reincarnation of Buddha.

At 2 a.m. on the 20th a large cluster of solid, well constructed buildings loomed up ahead lit by the beams of the headlights. Behind recently whitewashed walls of rough-cast appeared many imposing edifices. But these Egyptian-looking villas standing out against a background innocent of palm trees, were in reality inhabited by a community of two thousand Lamas, shaven-headed monks, swathed in ample red robes, who blinked in the dazzling

glare of the projectors as they stared at the strange cortège. It was Peilingmiao.

This was the end of the grass country. Ahead, to the west, lay arid regions, such as are shown blank on the maps, and there had been some difficulty in selecting a route across them to the next objective, which was the city of Suchow in the Province of Kansu. The camel-drivers, who had transported the supplies for the Expedition several months previously, maintained that the shortest road to Suchow was the one they had followed, namely the main caravan-trail which passes by the famous temple of Shan Te Miao¹ and then enters the indefinite area of the Kuai-tsze-hu Sands. But though the cars could cross sand-dunes with ease, this route had been rejected because to follow it would have entailed the consumption of too much petrol. In consequence of the investigations carried out by Petro during the previous eighteen months, it had been decided to cross the sand-belt at its narrowest point by making due west for the bed of the Etsin Gol River, and then following that stream up to Suchow.

A Chinese caravan-leader who had been engaged as a guide at Paowtow, was waiting at Peilingmiao. He had followed the route year by year since childhood and knew every inch of it. But when he saw the nine motor-cars he shook his head. He was responsible for an old father and four children, and had no mind to face the desolation of the Gobi in such vehicles. It is possible that his attitude was partly due to the general resentment against the Expedition felt by all Chinese engaged in the caravan trade. They feared that if motor-cars started crossing the Gobi they would eventually be driven out of business.

Gombo then stepped forward and offered his services. He had never been that way before, but he was sure that

¹ Visited by Sven Hedin.

he would find some Mongol en route who could supply the information he lacked. A guide, he maintained, was not needed. His honest face inspired confidence. His offer was accepted, and preparations were made for an early start. Since it was necessary to carry a very large quantity of petrol the cars were loaded up to the limit. On the 21st all were ready to move off. But a start could not be made as the whole Chinese Delegation was still missing. This delay was all the more annoying to Point because, according to a wireless message from Afghanistan picked up on the previous day, Haardt expected to reach Kashgar by the 20th July, and Point wished to be first at the rendezvous.

CHAPTER VI

THE GOBI

The arrival of the Chinese scientists—The granite labyrinth—In the solitude of the Black Gobi—Etsin Gol.

IN THE STREET next day Point saw a Chinaman, surrounded by a crowd of lamas, lay Mongols and camel-men, busily painting something on a white board. At a second glance he recognised this individual as the Chief of the Chinese Delegation.

“Hullo, Doctor, I didn’t know you had arrived. What are you doing?”

The learned doctor did not reply and finished what he was writing, which was three quotations from Sun Yat-sen’s testament.¹ He then nailed up the placard and began addressing his audience. Great, however, as was the respect of the latter for this scholar who could write so beautifully, they could not restrain their mirth. But when the speaker’s eyes flashed they quickly sobered down.

“All honour,” he concluded, “to the Republic and to the Kuomintang² which, I am convinced, will free our country from the burden of the unfair treaties forced upon us by foreigners who wish to rob us of our riches.”

This speech, made at the outset of an enterprise in which China had agreed to collaborate with France on purely non-political grounds, was, to say the least of it,

¹ Sun Yat-sen may be said to have been the Lenin of the Chinese.

² He was the founder of the Kuomintang party.

somewhat startling. Moreover, it was strange that the scientists had not informed the French members of the Expedition of their arrival, for they had been in Peiling-miao for several hours. However, Point restrained his feelings and invited them to meet his companions.

The Delegation was composed of eight members.¹ Its chief, Dr. Tsu Ming-yi, was Director of the Franco-Chinese Institute of Peking, officer of the Legion of Honour and Doctor of Medicine ; and on his card also appeared the following titles : " Member of the Central Committee of the Kuomintang." " Chief of the Sino-French Expedition." About forty years of age and in perfect condition, he was the creator of a new method of physical training.² Next in rank came General Yao, a graduate of Saint-Cyr, former Vice-Air Minister, who had been deputed by Marshal Chiang Kai-shek to convey a message of thanks to the Governor-General of Sinkiang for the present recently sent by him to the Nanking Government.³ Colonel Tiao, whose shaven head and furtive expression at once attracted attention, was third in importance. He was a graduate of the Soviet War College, where he had taken advanced courses in secret service and military intelligence. His mission was to censor the photographs and moving pictures taken by the Expedition. After him, and much more sympathetic, came Dr. Tsu Ming-yi's private secretary. Fifth was a young zoologist, Mr. Ho, a student of the Nanking Academy. He had been in Sinkiang once before as assistant to Dr. Hummel of the Sino-Swedish (Sven Hedin's) Expedition, and his sole reason for now joining the French was in order to return to that place. The three last members, Mr. Liu, a botanist ; Mr. Yung, a member of the Geological Survey of China, who had been Father

¹ It had been originally understood that it would consist of only four members.

² He was the author of a monograph on the sexual impulses of the female rabbit.

³ A block of jade of great value to be used as the seal of the Nanking Government.

Teilhard's assistant¹; and Mr. Chow, a journalist, whose rôle was not obvious.² A delicate man, he felt the cold and spoke little.

The atmosphere of the first meeting with the Chinese was polite, but no more. When everyone had gathered round a table for tea and cigarettes, Dr. Tsu Ming-yi, in accordance with the Chinese code of politeness, presented Point with a bag of rice and a packet of tea. After that the new arrivals were shewn the seats allotted to them in the cars.

"We also have some baggage," said the Doctor, and in the presence of Maurice Penaud, who wished to make an inventory, he and his companions began to off-load from their four lorries kitchen utensils, heavy blankets, kerosene stoves, bags of rice and dried vegetables, bales, suit-cases and trunks of all kinds.

The cars were already loaded almost to capacity with petrol, and the mechanics, in order to make room in their suit-cases for food, had left behind one third of their personal effects. For the same reason Specht had sent off by camel to Kanchow half his stock of cinema films. When Penaud saw what the scientists had brought he sat down on the ground and stoutly declared that if all these things had to be taken he refused to go. Point endeavoured to explain the situation to the Chinese, who raised their hands in despair when they saw the space reserved for them.

Where, asked the worthy Doctor, was he to put the bales of silk that he was taking as presents for the Provincial Governors? What was he to do with the two large flags bearing the inscriptions in gold characters: "Chief of the Expedition, Tsu Ming-yi," "Chief of the French Delegation, Haardt?" How, queried General Yao, was

¹ He had collaborated with the distinguished geologist for a number of years, and had accompanied him on many trips into the interior of China.

² Correspondent of the Kuo Ming News Agency, the official organ of the Kuomintang.

he to carry his stock of satin, his sword of honour and the autographed portraits of Marshal Chiang Kai-shek? But the matter was put to them straight: Did they or did they not want to go to Kashgar? Did they or did they not understand what it meant to travel a thousand miles across the desert without depots? Were they willing to risk their lives for their baggage? They did not reply, but fussed round the cars, formed little groups, talked among themselves, unpacked and repacked their bales, and grew more and more excited. After discussing the matter for five hours, they finally agreed to send three-quarters of their equipment back to Kalgan. But it took all the prestige and authority of Father Teilhard to make them listen to reason.

At 6.35 on the morning of Sunday the 24th May, everything was loaded, and the seven cars and two lorries started westwards from Peilingmiao. That same day, 3,000 miles away, Haardt was wending his way eastwards from Herat.

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Originally in working out the amount of petrol required for crossing the Gobi it had been impossible to estimate exactly the extra quantity to be allowed for bad going and sand dunes. From the outset Point had realised this and as a precaution had, a few days earlier, sent on ahead two lorries with 1,000 gallons to the Mongol encampment of Uniussu, 170 miles west of Peilingmiao. His idea was to establish there, on the threshold of the great desert, an auxiliary supply depot.

From Peilingmiao the ground was rough but passable, and the cars, following in the track of the lorries, made over seventy miles during the day, watches being put back one hour as the meridian of 105 was crossed. On the way were to be seen a few Mongol encampments, two lamaseries and three or four small Chinese farms, the advance



Ph. M. O. Williams, copyright N.G.S.

THE GOBI

guard of the slow but irresistible penetration of China into Mongolia. The trail led over rolling country, through great stretches of furze, over barren plateaux, across dry sandy river-beds and up rocky passes, before it again entered into the immensity of the steppe. During this stretch Father Teilhard prospected several palæozoic outcrops, and would much have liked to spend a few days hunting for fossils in this very promising area.

From the outset, communal life—which entails a certain amount of give-and-take—proved to be very difficult with the Chinese, who assumed that they could do anything they wanted without any consideration for others ; and Point, though most anxious to maintain a friendly attitude in all circumstances, had sometimes to take a firm line. An occasion for this occurred on the second morning out, when General Yao ordered a boy to serve him his coffee in bed and to roll up his bedding. Point was obliged to explain that everyone, including Father Teilhard, had to make his own bed, and that the boys were engaged exclusively for service in the kitchen. He suggested that a soldier, above all, would appreciate that discipline was indispensable for the success of any campaign. Thenceforth matters proceeded more smoothly.

On the 26th, at 3 p.m., after encountering more rocky gorges, dry river-beds, sandy hills, granite outcrops and indigestible “ nigger heads ” (whose shape, as Brull was careful to point out, was that of a paraboloid of revolution), the cars arrived at Uniussu, which consisted of a couple of *yurts* pitched near the banks of a river flowing between white granite cliffs. Here the reserve stock of petrol was duly found, and tanks were filled up. Extra tins were lashed to the mud-guards of the cars and trailers, which had been specially designed for the purpose, and in all some 1,800 gallons were taken on board before a start was made into the real desert—the *Shamo*—which lay

ahead.¹ As this extra weight was a strain on the car-springs, orders were given to drive slowly. While these preparations for continuing the journey were being made, Gombo foregathered with an old Mongol of over seventy years of age who, over an exchange of snuff-bottles, imparted certain information about the country between Uniussu and Hoyer Yamatu, 150 miles farther west. The route, it appeared, passed over two steep granite ridges and through some rocky gorges so narrow and treacherous that camels trying to negotiate them not infrequently broke their legs, and then it crossed high dunes for over a camel-stage. The gorges could be avoided, however, by making a detour to the south through a narrow neck in the dunes.

The fact that a storm was threatening made Brull anxious, as, with such a quantity of petrol on board, the whole convoy might go up in flames should one of the cars be struck by lightning. Father Teilhard, on the other hand, was overjoyed. He could distinguish on the horizon several of what he called "witnesses"—high mesas of red clay, sandstone and conglomerate which should enable the geologist to read the history of the Mongol Plateau for a million years.

Early next morning the roar of the engines announced the departure of the nine overloaded vehicles which crept slowly, like huge slugs, over the barren and desolate country on their way to Suchow, 800 miles distant. Ash-coloured hills bordered circular depressions, and everything was grey or black—as in a lunar landscape. The trail became more and more indistinct, and Point felt none too happy about the course which had been chosen in so haphazard a manner. At noon he "shot" the sun, and fixed his position at Long. 105° 30' E. and Lat. 41° 55' N.—130 miles north-west of the bend of the Yellow River.

¹ *Shamo* means sandy desert. The word *Gobi* signifies a gravel-covered plateau.

At six in the afternoon the solemn silence of the desert was broken by a vague sound which Gombo was the first to recognise as the distant tinkling of camel-bells. He could even tell by their tone whence the caravan came, for each town bordering the desert has its own particular bells, and they are to a caravan what a flag is to a ship. A little later a long string of camels silhouetted like a frieze against the glow of the sunset came into view on a ridge. They had left Suchow forty days earlier and were bound for Kuei-hwa-chen. Both parties stopped to exchange news. It was an unexpected opportunity to get off a letter, and everyone scribbled a hasty missive to send back by the caravan, which was only in the middle of its day's stage.¹

Next day the country became rocky and was intersected by numerous deep ravines with vertical sides. When evening fell the cars, which had followed one of these nullahs, were jammed one behind the other in a deep trench from which there was no issue, and the head of the column stopped at the top of a pass, on the brink of a vertical cliff. Next morning, as soon as there was enough light, a methodical search was made for a way out. Slightly to the south was a sandy valley, but, contrary to expectations, instead of widening out, it grew so narrow that in one place the walls had to be blasted to permit the passage of the cars, and half a mile farther on it ended in a precipice. It was impossible either to turn back or to go forward. Father Teilhard's view was that it was no use crawling up the valley because in Mongolia the granite ridges were often traversed by valleys of more recent formation which sometimes ended abruptly. What had to be done was to follow the crests, which were fairly flat.

But the wily Gombo had been investigating some hoof-marks, knowing that wild animals always choose the

¹ The caravans in the Gobi Desert break camp at noon and march almost without stopping until midnight. After a rest until dawn, the camels graze several hours. Explorers who refused to submit to this régime often lost all their animals.

easiest path to water, and had spotted a way out which with a little digging could be made passable for the cars. It was surprisingly close to that proposed by Father Teilhard. Thus, by different processes of reasoning the scientist and the nomad had arrived at the same solution. Towards evening the whole column issued forth on to a large sandy plain.

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The Chinese were already tired out, and did not care what happened. The trip had not turned out so easy as they had expected. Indeed, the prospect for all had been vague and unfriendly—an expanse of sand stretching along the horizon. By chance Gombo descried in the distance a Mongol with three camels, and went up to question him as to the best way to reach Hoyer Yamatu without crossing the great sand waste. The Mongol pointed to some blue crests in the distance, in which direction, he said, the dunes narrowed to a neck only three miles wide, beyond which the ground was harder. He added that it was advisable not to talk loudly when passing through the neck, as one might be led astray by the evil spirits which haunted it. The road thence would lie to the south-west, and led to three ridges. From the crest of the third would be visible a mountain with five peaks. From the left peak would be seen a dead tree from which a track led to a *yurt*, where further enquiry could be made. All this would take some time, no doubt. A long time on foot ; less on a horse ; a little more on a camel.

This was perplexing, but Gombo was quite satisfied, and certain that the information was correct. He was right. By following the directions the *yurt* was found. Outside it, by a well, an old woman was shearing a sheep. At the approach of the cars, she did not even turn her head ; and her husband did not trouble to come out of the *yurt* in which he was sitting.

"Sambainaa . . ." ("Good day").

"Amerhen Bainaa." . . .

Gombo offered his snuff-bottle and asked the way to Hoyer Yamatu. The man gave the required information, but did not volunteer a single question. Asked if he had ever seen foreigners, he replied "No." And he had never seen "iron horses." And he did not know or care what the Expedition was, whence it had come or where it was going.

The last three days had been very fatiguing. The wanderings in the granite range, the dunes, the small mechanical breakdowns, the constant delays, and the anxiety, had exhausted everyone. Our Chinese comrades seemed to be at the end of their patience.

Hoyer Yamatu, where Point decided to halt for half a day, was an encampment of five or six *yurts*, and one of the trading-centres which nomads periodically visited to obtain certain essential commodities such as salt, millet, snuff, and material for clothes, for which they bartered wool, sheepskins, and fox- and wolf-pelts at the stores. In the Gobi all the retail stores are branches of big Kalgan firms, and are run by Chinese agents who, in addition to trading, lend money and do a bit of smuggling. In order to obtain some information about the country and the possibility of finding a guide, Petro went into one of the *yurts*, where he found several Chinese traders and a number of Mongols. Under pretext of buying a few *hata* he started a conversation and soon learned that Painté Tologoï, the next stage, was 120 miles ahead, and that there was no water for thirty miles. The Chinese doubted the possibility of finding a guide. The Mongols present did not dare to go in a car because one day's travel might carry them so far that weeks would be needed to make the return journey on foot. Even the most generous offers failed to tempt them. The traders informed Petro among other things

that a caravan of twelve camels which was encamped near by was returning empty to Paotow the following morning, and that two of the Chinese members of the Expedition had hired mounts from the caravan-leader to take them back to that place.

To the last statement, which he regarded as gossip, Petro did not pay much attention. But it was true. An argument between Point and Mr. Ho, the Chinese geologist, who appeared to have purposely provoked a dispute, had ended in a slight but regrettable fracas. As a result the Chinaman claimed that he had "lost face," and had arranged to leave, taking Mr. Chow, the journalist, with him.

Since the two places in the caravan had been engaged the previous evening it was evident that the affair had been planned in advance, but the reason for it was not clear. The hardships of the journey, the discipline, the rationing of food, and the probability of future troubles, may have had something to do with it. But in any case it was certain that Mr. Chow would not fail to exploit the incident upon his return to Peking, and so might jeopardise the success of the Expedition. The only result of an effort on the part of Dr. Tsu Ming-yi to bring about a reconciliation was that he was roundly abused by his fellow-countrymen for his pains. Nothing more could be done.

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The party left Hoyer Yamatu on the 1st June at half-past two in the afternoon. The Chinese, whose number had now been decreased by two, were polite but reserved. Ahead stretched a vast plateau covered with rocks and patches of dunes. Sand was everywhere and in all forms—hard, moderately hard, soft. In some places it was bound by sparse tamarisks, in others it was loose. Here coarse, there it was as fine as flour, and choked the travellers as it was carried along by a following wind.

Next morning all were awakened by a squall which stripped off their blankets. As it was impossible to remain in the open, even with goggles and covered faces, everyone took shelter inside the cars, which stood up to the battering of the sand as a ship stands up to a heavy sea. No sooner, however, did they start than they had to stop, for the drivers were quite unable to see ahead. The sand, projected obliquely by the sixty-mile gale, pelted against the metal bodies, penetrated the curtains and filled ears and noses. The Chinese boys lay flat under a trailer, with their heads in tarpaulin buckets, and did not dare to move. The storm lasted three hours, and when it died down all traces of the track had disappeared. One curious result of it was that anyone touching a door-handle or other metal part of the cars and trailers received a shock, for the metal, insulated from the earth by the rubber bands and tyres, had been charged with electricity by the friction of the dry sand and wind. It was therefore necessary to keep well clear of the tanks and tins of petrol. The serious problem, however, was that of rediscovering the trail, the only evidence that it had ever existed being the complete skeleton of a camel, with skull, ribs, spine and hoofs.

"Camels should have no difficulty in finding spare parts in this country," laughed Gauthier, as he looked at the bones, picked clean by wolves and vultures.

Gombo's belief that he was going in the right direction was confirmed when he saw an *obo*,¹ which showed that a well could not be very far away. A few minutes later he found it, protected by large rocks.² Beside it lay a wooden trough, a rope and a goat-skin water-bag weighted down

¹ It is an unwritten law of the desert that every traveller who halts must collect a few stones in a pile at the side of the track or add more stones to an already existing mound. These mounds, called "*obo*," are the sign-posts of the desert. They have also a religious significance, and many of them are sacred.

² In the Gobi the wells are under the protection of the traveller. Never is the trough, the rope or the dipper stolen. On the contrary, these things when worn out are replaced by someone. The wells are always sheltered from the drifting sand by stones, some of which are brought from a great distance.

with heavy stones. The water was warm and brackish but drinkable. Farther on, a stone post with Mongol characters marked the western boundary of Ala Shan and the beginning of the land of the Torhout Mongols of the Etsin Gol. The route closely followed the frontier of Outer Mongolia ; and in the evening Gombo met a shepherd who had just trekked out of Mongolia with his family and his flocks, in order to escape from the Soviet régime. He was delighted to exchange a sheep for several petrol tins.¹

Since the departure from Tientsin, Brull had kept an accurate log, recording hour by hour, kilometre by kilometre, all his observations. The following extracts are from it :

"June 3rd. 8.45 a.m. (Km. 13) Car No. 1 stops on account of a blow-out. 9.30 (Km. 20) Teilhard prospects much eroded cliff of red clay. 9.45 (Km. 21) The cars help the lorries up a sandy slope. 11.45 (Km. 39) Halt for lunch near a well close to recently dead camel."

"June 4th. Departure at 5.10 a.m. Bad ground,² the lorries get stuck. 7.05 a.m. (Km. 15) Piat's lorry sinks up to the axle in a *loess* depression. Manœuvres. 10.35 (Km. 47) Chaotic landscape. Chemical colouring. Grey and yellow predominate ; the hills resemble the slag heaps of a blast furnace. 3 p.m. Grey sky and bright sun. Long climb among black schists laminated and exfoliated like slates by lateral pressure."

"June 5th. The Black Gobi. Delayed departure for greasing and cleaning. Flat firm soil between blank hillocks. 11 a.m. Area of dejection cones. Piat's petrol tank crushed by a stone. Sudden sand-storm. Climb on to plateau. Gusty side-wind. Big domes of hills spotted with yellow. The tracks of the cars ahead disappear very

¹ For a Mongol an empty petrol tin has a specific value. He prefers it to a sheep's paunch for drawing water from a well.

² "Bad Ground"—very fine *loess* covered by a thin layer of gravel. This ground is more difficult for wheeled vehicles than sand.

quickly. Point loses the trail and looks for it under a terrific wind. Layers of sand like streams of yellow water on the mica windows of the cars."

About mid-day on the 6th the cars crossed the last chain of dunes and came close to the Etsin Gol. Through a gap in the sand, as if by magic, there appeared large forests, meadows and freshwater lakes—the beginning of a great oasis. While the others seized the opportunity to have a swim, Point took an observation and ascertained his position to be near Khara Khoja, 250 miles north of Suchow. This meant that the Black Gobi had been left behind, and that the worst of the journey was over. But the general feeling of elation was considerably damped when the petrol came to be checked. Several tins had burst owing to the heat, and a whole fifty-gallon tank had been caved in. There was just enough left to go 120 miles. Suchow, the next supply dump, was twice that distance away !

CHAPTER VII

THE TREATY OF SUCHOW

The Mâ family—The Chinese scientists—Point resigns his leadership—
The Min-shui Pass—The border line of Sinkiang.

ACCORDINGLY, on the 7th, Point, Petro, and Raymond set out for Suchow with one car and one lorry in order to pick up 500 gallons of petrol and bring it back to meet the main body which was to follow. With them also went General Yao and Colonel Tiao, who had begged to accompany Point, on the pretext of having official business with the Governor, their real motive being not to lose touch with any fraction of the Expedition. Twenty-four hours later Brull followed with the remaining cars.

The thick, luxuriant jungle of the Etsin Gol, through which the party now passed, with its little lakes, green tamarisks, young elms, and its poplar groves,¹ presented a great contrast to the bare, sandy desert which encroached upon it from all sides. This oasis, where the Torhout Mongols turn out their sheep and cattle to graze, is only six or seven miles long, running as it does parallel to the branches of the Etsin Gol River, which are fed by the snows of the Nan Shan Mountains south of Suchow.² Farther south the country was found to be densely populated ; and groups of pilgrims were seen on their way to obtain the blessing of some great lama, for which they were willing to brave the hardships of the desert. Here and there

¹ *Populus Euphratica* (*Populus heterophylla*) or *Toghrak*. This curious tree has willow leaves at its base and poplar leaves higher up.

² Richtoffen's Range.

stood ruined watch-towers, ancient advance posts of the Great Wall.¹

On the 10th Gombo and one of the boys, who were on a lorry ahead of the main body picking up Point's trail, saw galloping towards them a band of about a hundred armed horsemen wearing Chinese uniform. When close up, the leader ordered the lorry-driver to halt and asked who they were and what they were carrying. On learning that they were travellers conveying cooking utensils and petrol, he ordered everything to be off-loaded. Resistance being useless, the party began to obey. The man continued :

"Are you alone on the road ? "

"No. There are six cars behind us."

"What sort of cars ? "

"Armoured military cars belonging to foreigners who are going on an official mission to Sinkiang," replied the boy pompously.

"Are they armed ? "

"Very much so. There are two machine guns in each car as well as a small gun."

This reply, which, to say the least of it, was an exaggeration, made its impression. The chief reconsidered matters.

"Load up again. As for you, Elder Brother,"² he added politely, turning to the boy, "be kind enough to 'lend' me your hunting knife and revolver."

The request was obeyed, as otherwise it would have been enforced by a pistol shot or a beating.

At this moment the cars appeared over a rise. The sight of such an imposing squadron disconcerted the bandits, but its occupants, interested in this unpremeditated encounter and unsuspecting of danger, got out of the cars. Specht rigged up his camera and began shooting the scene, while everyone else took snapshots of the surprised

¹ The Great Wall begins at Shanhaikwan and follows the former boundary of China.

² Polite form of Chinese address.

strangers. Suddenly Balourdet recognised an Expedition knife hanging from the belt of one of them and noticed, also, that his own rifle was the object of a great deal of envious attention. Without more ado he gave the usual signal to start—two blasts on the horn—and the whole party at once moved on. It was none too soon, for, once over their surprise, the bandits would not have hesitated to attack to get possession of the arms.

On the 11th Brull's party reached Tien Ts'ang, the first village in the zone cultivated by the Chinese, and there it was forced to halt, for, though Suchow was now only a hundred miles distant, the petrol-tanks were empty. The arrival of the cars caused great excitement, and for three days they were surrounded by spectators, some of whom had come in from long distances to see them. The Chinese were markedly far more curious than the Mongols, and to them Kervizic seemed a magician as he worked in the wireless car trying to get into touch with the outside world. On the evening of the 12th he intercepted a message from Haardt saying that the Pamir Group had arrived at Kabul, and he also received one from the French Legation in Peking, which, being in code, could not be read until Point returned. This did not entail a long wait, for next night the beams of light sweeping the sky announced his approach. He was well pleased with the result of his trip. The officials at Suchow had been friendly, especially the Governor, Mâ Pu-fang, who had even offered to lend him his saddle-horses. But he had for some reason refused to see General Yao and Colonel Tiao, who were thereby much upset. Li¹ had done his work well, and though the city had changed hands only a week earlier, the stock of petrol, which in the circumstances might well have been commandeered, was untouched.

¹ Petro's "boy," who had been sent with the Expedition's first caravan originally conveying supplies to Suchow.



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ON THE 15TH JUNE THE SEVEN TRACK-CARS CROSS THE WALLS OF
SUCHOW

Point's good spirits, however, quickly evaporated when he decoded the message from Peking, which had been transmitted from Sinkiang :

“ The Governor-General of Sinkiang is greatly surprised to learn that a political delegation from Nanking is placed at the head of the French Scientific Mission. He calls attention to the fact that the authorisation to pass through his province was granted exclusively to the French members of the Expedition.”

To this both Point and Brull expected some violent reaction on the part of Dr. Tsu Ming-yi. But, on reading the telegram, he remained quite calm, declaring that the message was faked and that he would disregard it entirely. The Group proceeded on its way, and on the 15th all seven cars passed through the thick city-wall of Suchow, making their way through streets so crowded that the people had to be pushed from under the wheels or pulled off the trailers. When it was found that the store of supplies was also intact there was much jubilation and a general feeling of victory. The Gobi had been crossed.

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The city of Suchow, which had so recently changed hands, was now occupied by the troops of General Mâ Pufang, who had driven off his cousin General Mâ Chungying, nephew of General Mâ Chi and also nephew of General Mâ Hung-ping, Governor-General of the Kansu Province.

Some explanation of the ramifications of the Mâ family is essential.

The greater part of the population in the Chinese provinces of Kansu, Ching Hai, Ningsia, and Shensi, known under the generic name of Shen-kan, consists of

Tungans. The Tungans, descendants of Chinese and Arabs, or Chinese and Turks, are Muhammadans. They are very turbulent, and the Chinese have always had difficulty in governing them directly. The policy of the Manchu Dynasty, therefore, was to appoint Tungans to administer Shen-kan, and in this way the family of Mâ came into prominence, as they were given all the important military and civil posts.

The recent events at Suchow were a family affair. The rivalry between the two cousins, Mâ Pu-fang and Mâ Chung-ying was only apparent. The latter, who governed the north-western corridor of Kansu (the cities of Kanchow, Suchow and Ansi), conceived the idea of conquering Sinkiang and of establishing there a Muhammadan empire. This ambitious project was frowned upon by the family council and vetoed by everyone except by young General Mâ Pu-fang, the commander of the troops in the neighbouring Province of Ching Hai. None the less, for six months Mâ Chung-ying had been preparing for his attack on Sinkiang.

Having only a small number of troops at his disposal, he feared that his territory might be occupied during his absence by his uncle, old General Mâ Hung-ping, who had been the first to disapprove of his project. So, to protect his rear, he asked Mâ Pung-fang to occupy his territory. But without some ostensible and plausible pretext it was not possible for Mâ Pung-fang to invade a neighbouring province, even collusively and by agreement. Mâ Chung-ying, therefore, made a secret alliance with his cousin and arranged for incidents on the frontier, which gave the latter an excuse for asking the Central Government's permission to conduct a punitive campaign. The request was granted. Mâ Chung-ying was fictitiously declared a rebel ; and Mâ Pung-fang advanced into his territory, but occupied only such places as had been

evacuated by the former's troops, which were now concentrated at Ansi and Tun Huang on the borders of Sinkiang.

Such was the political state of affairs—a pretty kettle of fish—in June, 1931, when the Expedition arrived at Suchow, and it was enough to make Point very anxious, for it meant that the main road to Sinkiang, which passed through the cities of Ansi and Hsing-hsing-hsia, where stocks of petrol and other supplies had been deposited, was far from safe. He also feared that Mâ Chung-ying, at the moment when he was preparing to invade Sinkiang, would hardly welcome the arrival of a group of foreigners equipped with wireless who might be witnesses of his military activities. While he was discussing this situation with Brull and Petro, the Chief of Police was announced. It was purely a social visit, but the official seemed friendly and Point decided to ask his advice.

“So far as you are concerned,” said the old mandarin, “there is nothing to fear. Are you not the honoured guests of our Government and absolutely neutral in all these quarrels? It might, however, be bad policy for you to appear unexpectedly, and I advise you to wire your intention to Mâ Chung-ying.”

Point immediately sent a telegram, hoping to receive a reply before the departure of the Expedition, which was timed for the next day. Petro, on the other hand, was less optimistic, being troubled by the attitude of General Yao and Colonel Tiao, who had been received by General Mâ Pu-fang during Point's absence from Suchow on his way back to meet Brull. Yao had presented the Governor with one of the famous autographed portraits of Marshal Chiang Kai-shek and had discussed with him the possibility of the eventual arming of the Kansu troops by the Nanking Government. The two scientists must also have discussed the French—probably in unfavourable terms—for since

their arrival at Suchow they had kept apart from the other members of the Expedition and had taken all their meals at an inn, under the pretext that the Chinese food was more to their liking.

But, whatever the cause, when on the evening of the 17th, Mâ Pu-fang came to inspect the cars, his attitude had undergone a complete change. He forbade the departure of the Expedition, ordered the wireless mast to be taken down immediately, demanded that all passports be handed over to him, and declared that he would have a list prepared during the night of the arms which might be carried.

At Point's request he gave permission for him to use the Chinese telegraph to wire to Peking ; and an urgent message at triple rates addressed to the French Legation was taken by Li to the telegraph office. The clerk, after accepting payment—for which he gave a receipt— informed Li in confidence that in accordance with the explicit instructions he had received the message would not be signalled.

“ But why did he issue a regular receipt ? ” asked Point, when Li reported this incident.

“ One must live,” replied Li with candour.¹

“ That being so,” remarked Petro, “ I think the clerk might possibly be tempted to forward to my old friend, Mâ Hung-ping, Governor-General of Kansu, a personal telegram in Chinese, asking his authorisation to leave the city.”

On again returning from the telegraph office, Li reported that the second telegram—presented with a fairly large “ squeeze ”—had actually been despatched. Mâ Hung-ping's reply came the next morning :

¹ In the remote districts of China employés of the telegraph administration take their wages out of the office receipts. As Suchow was in a state of war, the priority of despatching telegrams belonged to the military authorities, and the receipts of the office were reduced to nothing. An urgent telegram sent by civilians was therefore an unhopèd-for stroke of luck.

“ Glad to learn your safe arrival at Suchow. Wish you a happy journey to Sinkiang. Enquire, however, from the local authorities as to the safety of the road. Am sending specific instructions to Suchow officials in charge. Your younger brother Mâ.”¹

In the existing circumstances it seemed improbable that the local governor would permit the Expedition to take the main road to Sinkiang via Ansi, but having now received telegraphic instructions from his official superior, he could not well forbid its departure by a route which avoided the disturbed area. It was therefore imperative to get hold of someone who knew such a route, and Gombo went out in search. He returned with an old camel-driver who claimed to know a road which crossed the desert from Suchow to Hami. This man, by name Pô, a well-known caravan-leader and a native of Hami, said that he had made the trip seventeen times. It then had to be ascertained whether there was a sufficient quantity of petrol to reach Hami by this way without refilling at any intermediate point.

As Li had heard that Hami also was likely to be a centre of trouble and doubted if the supplies already dumped there could be counted on,² it was decided to load up enough petrol to take the cars to Turfan, 700 miles away. Luckily, at Suchow there was the requisite amount—2,200 gallons³—and the only thing which remained to be done was to obtain permission to leave as soon as possible.

The Governor-General's telegram had had its effect. When requested, Mâ Pu-fang immediately granted Point an audience and received him once more very cordially, entirely ignoring recent misunderstandings.

¹ Formula of politeness.

² When the Expedition eventually arrived at Hami it was found that its stock of oil and petrol had, in fact, been requisitioned by the military authorities.

³ Fortunately Haardt had ordered a reserve supply of 2,200 gallons to be shipped to Suchow over and above the amount needed for the regular trip.

"If you go directly by the northern route and avoid the city of Ansi, I no longer have any objection to your departure," he said. "Two days ago when I forbade you to leave the city by the main road, I was acting only in your interest. Is it not stipulated on your passports that the local authorities are responsible for your safety? How could I, therefore, so grossly neglect my duty, as to let you fall into Mâ Chung-ying's clutches? He is an unscrupulous man and would certainly not hesitate to requisition your cars for his personal use."

Point returned from the interview in great good humour and ordered preparations to be made for an immediate start. As politeness indicated a gift to the Governor, he sent Li to the *yamen*¹ with a Mauser pistol, 200 cartridges and a pair of prism field-glasses, a present usually much appreciated by the Chinese. Li came back in an hour in a state of great excitement. He said that there had been a big change, that he had been received like a dog, and that after keeping him waiting for an hour, the General did not even open the package.² The latter sent word that he did not need any presents, and that Li was to inform Point that the permission to leave on the following day had been cancelled. There had evidently been "double crossing" somewhere.

At nine in the evening there was a knock on the gate, and a visitor was discreetly led into the kitchen. It was one of Li's friends. A few minutes later Li came into the room and made mysterious signs to Point and Petro to follow him to the kitchen. There they were surprised to find Mâ Pu-fang's Chief of Staff, who addressed them dramatically :

"I have been dangerously ill, and life was a burden to me. The local healers only aggravated my state, but your

¹ Headquarter office.

² The refusal of a present in such circumstances is considered by the Chinese to imply a rupture of diplomatic negotiations.

doctor, enlightened by the science of your honourable country, gave me medicines which restored my health. To prove my gratitude I shall disclose the real reasons which compel our General to forbid your departure. Three of the Chinese associates of your Expedition, who are very important members of the Central Government, have informed General Mâ Pu-fang that they had wired to Nanking to demand the cancellation of your passports. At the same time the Governor-General of Kansu has telegraphed instructions that you are to be allowed to proceed on your journey. General Mâ Pu-fang cannot make head or tail of the whole affair. On the one hand he wishes to obey the Governor-General, but on the other he fears to compromise himself with the Nanking Government. Make your Chinese friends withdraw their objections and I guarantee that he will be only too glad to let you go. Read that. . . .”

He produced a document, which Petro read with amazement. It was a letter from Dr. Tsu Ming-yi to Mâ Pu-fang :

“ I enclose herewith a copy of the contract between Haardt and the Federation of Chinese Scientific Associations, which will clearly explain to you the respective rights of the Chinese and the French members of the Expedition. But, from the very beginning, the foreigners have failed to respect this agreement, especially :

“ (1) The second clause of paragraph B, article 14, concerning photographic and moving picture work.

“ (2) Paragraph A, article 5, concerning the prerogatives of the Chinese director.

“ I must also draw your attention to another fact. In the middle of the desert, twenty stages from any inhabited locality, the chief of the French Group, Pu-An (Point), gravely insulted the Chinese zoologist, Mr. Ko

Ho, and abandoned him. Mr. Chow, who took sides with his friend, suffered the same fate. Unluckily we were unable to intervene on their behalf, as the foreigners were more numerous and better armed than ourselves. We do not know what has happened to our unfortunate friends. They may have died from thirst or been attacked by bandits.¹

"Your decision to forbid the foreigners to use their wireless was most wise. It was a patriotic act because not only does it prevent them from sending information which may injure the sovereign dignity of our country, but it also protects the interests of the National Telegraph Administration, which would otherwise be deprived of its rightful revenue.

"The facts stated above have been communicated in full to our Government, which will not fail to send you the necessary instructions. In the meantime, I request that you oppose as energetically as possible the departure of the Expedition."

This fully explained Mâ Pu-fang's action, but that of Dr. Tsu Ming-yi and his colleagues remained a mystery. What were their real motives for trying to stop the Expedition? Point was positive that although the Doctor had declared the telegram from the Governor of Sinkiang to be false, he had taken it as a serious warning. From the point of view of the Chinese, for the French to continue the journey while they remained behind would be not only a great "loss of face" for Dr. Tsu Ming-yi and his colleagues, but also a blow to the prestige of the Central Government. When Point had thought the matter over, he asked the Doctor and General Yao to a round-table conference.

¹ Upon arrival at Suchow Dr. Tsu Ming-yi had received a telegram from Mr. Ho stating that he and Mr. Chow had safely arrived at Paotow, the terminus of a railway line.

"Do you admit writing this letter to the General?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the Doctor.

"Do you not realise that the detention of the Expedition might have consequences that would be detrimental to your career, Dr. Tsu? Are you not Director of the Franco-Chinese Institute in Peking and an Officer of the Legion of Honour? And you, General," he said, turning to General Yao, "do you find this attitude compatible with the fostering of closer relations between China and France, the policy which you have constantly advocated ever since you left Saint Cyr?"

In reply, the Doctor explained in eloquent terms the delicacy of his position.

"I suggest," said Point, when he had finished, "that in the event of any difficulties arising in the way of the entry of the Chinese Delegation into Sinkiang, the French and the Chinese remain united. Either we all go into Sinkiang or we all wait together on the frontier for the arrival of Monsieur Haardt, the Chief of the Expedition."

Both the Chinese stated that they would send their reply the following day. It was communicated in the form of a contract :

"In virtue of a mutual understanding between the undersigned representatives of the Sino-French Scientific Expedition, it is hereby agreed, beginning from to-day, the 20th June, 1931, that :

"1. Mr. Brull shall take the temporary leadership of the French Group until its junction with Mr. Haardt.

"2. General Yao shall henceforth control all messages sent and received by the wireless of the Expedition. In localities where a Chinese Government telegraph station exists, all messages shall be sent by wire, unless such communications have been interrupted.

“ 3. In the event of either the French or the Chinese members not being allowed to enter Sinkiang, the whole Expedition shall wait at the borders of that Province. Under no condition shall the two Groups separate.

“ 4. All past incidents shall be forgotten. Should any member of the Expedition still consider himself unfairly treated, the matter shall be taken up and settled upon the return of the Expedition to Peking.

“ 5. All decisions pertaining to the march of the Expedition shall be taken jointly by Dr. Tsu Ming-yi and Mr. Brull.

“ 6. All incidents which may occur in the future shall be settled, not by the interested parties, but by the two chiefs, Dr. Tsu Ming-yi and Mr. Brull.

“ 7. This agreement shall be signed by three Chinese members of the Expedition—Dr. Tsu, General Yao and Colonel Tiao ; and by three French members of the Expedition—Messrs. Point, Brull and Father Teilhard de Chardin.

“ In witness whereof, we hereunto set our hand and affix our seals.”

Without a word Point at once signed the document ; and thus consented to give up his command so that the journey might be continued, for time was precious.

That evening the final preparations were completed, and next morning the Expedition set out on the desert trail towards Hami. It left just in time. Twenty-four hours later, General Mâ Hung-ping transmitted to Mâ Pu-fang an order he had received from the Nanking Government that the Expedition was to be stopped immediately, its passports taken away, and all members sent back to Peking under escort.

It came out afterwards that as an act of friendship

Mâ Hung-ping had held up these orders in his office.¹ When Mâ Pu-fang finally received them, it was too late. The Expedition was already far in the desert following the line indicated by Pô.

It took five days to cover the two hundred and fifty miles between Suchow and the Min-shui Pass on the Sinkiang frontier. Everything that Pô had said proved true. Not only were the gorges wide and the approaches to the mountain passes easy, but the distances between wells were absolutely as he had stated. For the most part the soil was hard, and this portion of the Gobi seemed less forbidding than the country east of the Etsin Gol. Water was plentiful, and in the Ma Tsung Shan (Horse's Mane Mountains)² the pastures were rich—gazelles,³ ibex, mountain sheep, wild horses, and wild asses being found amongst the local fauna. It was strange, however, that there was so little trace of human beings in this district, which was an excellent one for cattle-raising and hunting. On the whole stretch between Suchow and the Min-shui Pass only one Mongol encampment was seen. Early on the morning of the 25th, the Expedition arrived at the crumbling walls of an old fort with four ruined watch-towers. This was formerly the key to the Min-shui Pass, which is situated at one of the most important cross-roads of Central Asia. All the trails from the Eastern Gobi converge there, and then, separating again, lead either towards Barkul and Ku-cheng, north of the Tian Shan mountains, or towards Hami, Turfan and the Tarim Basin.

Near the spring,⁴ at the foot of the pass, stood a wooden

¹ Three years previously Petro had rendered an important service to General Mâ Hung-ping, then commander of a division at Singanfu. "I hope some day I shall have the opportunity of proving my gratitude," old Mâ had then said to him.

² This name, Ma Tsung Shan, is very appropriate, as the mountain range, traversed by many parallel valleys, looks from the distance like a horse's mane.

³ *Gazella subgutturosa*. These gazelles are found in small groups of four or five. The gazelle *subgutturosa* of the Grass Lands west of Kalgan always graze in large herds.

⁴ The spring of Min-shui (Clear Waters) which gives its name to the Pass.

post, on one side of which was written in Chinese : " Danger ! Don't go west. Hide your camels in the mountains and wait." It was obviously a recent warning—a " gazette of the desert"—left by some anonymous caravan-leader for the benefit of all travellers.

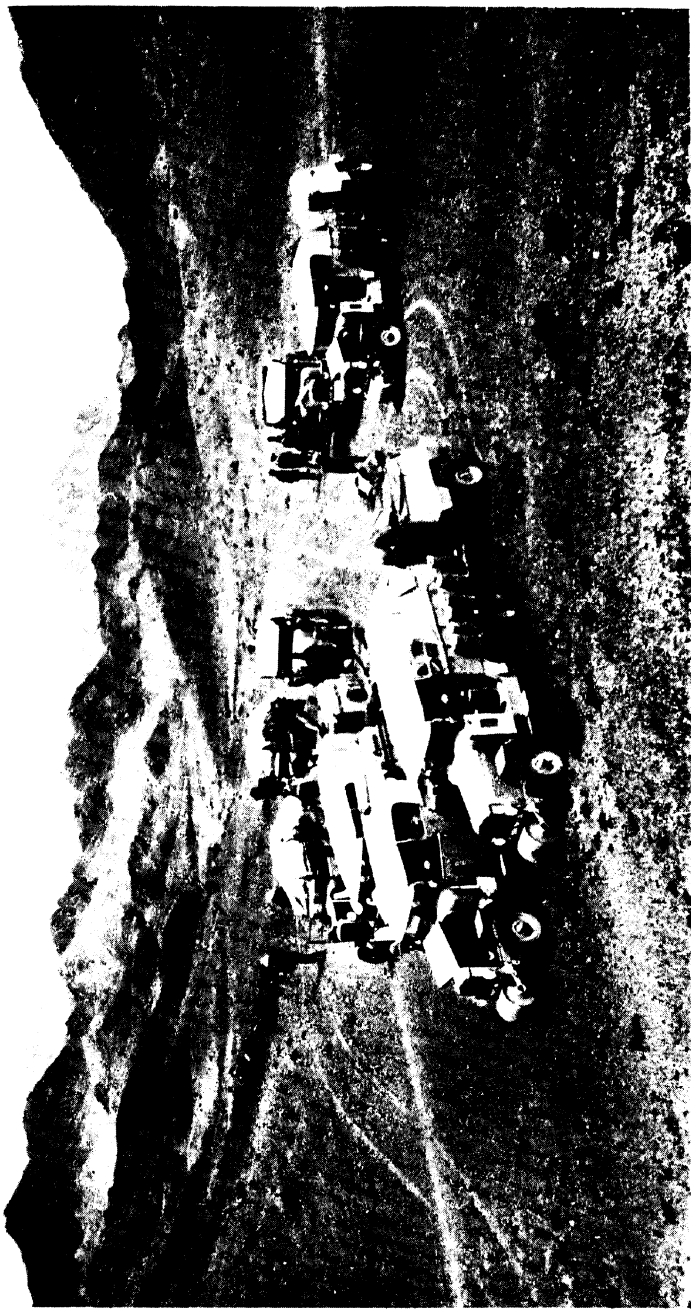
The Min-shui Fort stands in the centre of a circular plateau, surrounded by rocky escarpments which form the tiers of a natural amphitheatre. The trail, following the bed of a dry torrent, entered a fissure in the bare mountains, which grew higher and higher, leaving only a small gap towards the west, where two large *obo* stood out against the sky. At the top of the pass the view, so restricted before, suddenly opened out. The Mongolian plateau ended abruptly, and beyond the last foot-hills a vast plain stretched unbroken to the hazy horizon where lay Sinkiang.

From the summit the cars, hidden from one another by clouds of dust, descended the smooth incline at full speed, like arrows shot from a bow.

When at dusk they overtook a caravan, some fifty miles farther west, great was the surprise of everybody to see the word " CITROËN" painted in large letters on the boxes carried by the camels. This was caravan Number 5, which had left Paotow for Hami on the 11th February, with 71 camels laden with 138 cases of spare parts, motor-oil and provisions.

On being asked why he was so late, since he ought to have reached Hami about six weeks earlier, the caravan-leader confessed that he had left Paotow on an unpropitious date. It was all the fault of the *Lao Tao* (Taoist priest) who had advised him ill, and he had been followed by a *Kuei*, or demon, ever since the beginning of the journey. It was the *Kuei* who was responsible for all his misfortunes, and who had forced him to abandon several camels.¹ It was the *Kuei* who had made him lose his bills of

¹ There is a superstition which prevents a camel-driver from admitting that any of his camels died on the road. He always says, " They became useless and I threw them away."



Ph. Specht, copyright E.C.C.A.

THE MIN-SHUI PASS

lading, his documents and his supply of salt. The cases, however, were all there.

Of what was happening at Hami the man knew no more than he had read on the stake at the Min-shui Pass. He had decided to ignore that warning and to go on, convinced that his cargo was safe from looting, for scrap metal and oil were not edible and would tempt no one. Nevertheless, old Pô advised him for safety's sake to follow the tracks of the cars for two stages and then to stop. And it was arranged that when the Expedition reached Hami someone should be sent back to meet the caravan with instructions as to how it should act and where it should go in case of danger.

On the 28th, having covered sixty-five miles the previous day, the Expedition arrived at the first village on the outskirts of the oasis of Hami.¹ The houses were in flames and, except for two excited Chantos,² who came out to meet the cars, the village had been abandoned. Although the men were panic-stricken and spoke incoherently, Petro managed to make out their broken Chinese.

"Don't go over there. Don't go west. They are fighting. . . ." The Chantos beat their fists together to emphasise the statement.

"But who is fighting?"

"Everybody. . . ."

It was true. In the near distance could be heard a continuous rattle, punctuated by dull reports—machine guns and artillery. Evidently the amenities of modern civilisation were not unknown in Sinkiang.

¹ The village of Yi K'o Shu (Lone Tree).

² Eastern Turks. The Chinese call them *Chan T'ou*, which means "Turban-headed."

CHAPTER VIII

SINKIANG

A battle—Chinese *versus* Muhammadans—Point is summoned in haste to Urumchi—The 14th July at Turfan.

THE NINE VEHICLES pulled up in a sunken road on the far side of the burning village. No one knew what was ahead—Chinese regulars, rebels, or bandits. Apprehensive of the possibilities, Dr. Tsu Ming-yi readily agreed that the Chinese flags should be lowered and the French colours alone left flying over the cars. Specht, overjoyed at the chance of a sensational film, rigged up his tripod camera on the roof of the cinema car. Mr. Liu was less enthusiastic, and with marked disfavour watched the rifles being loaded by the French. In his opinion the safest course was to hide all arms and surrender without resistance in the event of attack.

When Specht was ready, the cavalcade moved forward, Point being on the look-out, with a pair of field-glasses, astride the bonnet of the first lorry. The shots sounded closer : a riderless horse crossed the road and disappeared at a gallop. Three hundred yards farther on, the cars emerged on to an open field. In the valley ahead there were at least a thousand soldiers firing independently as they ran towards the surrounding hills, on which were groups of horsemen galloping about. The surprise and curiosity caused by the sudden appearance of the cars

seemed to paralyse both sides, and all firing ceased.¹ After a few minutes, five men in Chinese uniform left the main body and advanced towards the strangers. At a respectful distance one of them took off his cap, made a profound bow, and said in Chinese :

“ Are you the Sino-French Expedition ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Then you are welcome. We have been expecting you at Hsing-hsing-hsia for several months.”

“ What’s going on here ? Whom are you fighting ? ”

“ These Muhammadan dogs. Our colonel will tell you everything. Come and join our forces. Don’t stay here. It’s dangerous.”

By now the Chinese, taking advantage of the lull, had hastened to occupy the commanding points ; and their red and yellow flags could be seen fluttering on the hills on both sides of the valley.

Slowly the cars moved forward to join the troops. The road was partly blocked by the carcasses of animals, and on all sides the ground was strewn with corpses. Here terror-stricken children were hiding under overturned carts. There a woman wept over her dying husband. Farther on a soldier, having turned out the pockets of a dead comrade, was pulling the shoes off the corpse. Maddened camels, straining at their head-ropes, tore their nostrils and filled the air with piercing cries. Some of them broke away, threw off their loads and dragged them along the ground. Everywhere lay cartridge-cases and belts.

“ Is there a doctor among you ? ”

But Delastre, assisted by Father Teilhard, had already improvised a first-aid station, and was surrounded

¹ It was learned later that the Muhammadan cavalry mistook the Expedition for government armoured cars hauling artillery (our trailers). Moreover, the camera standing on a tripod on top of the cinema car looked from the distance like a machine-gun.

by thirty or more bleeding and limping men. For the serious cases he could do nothing. They had lost too much blood.¹

In the meantime, the commander of the detachment, Colonel Chang, came up to greet the Expedition. He said that his troops had previously occupied the frontier post of Hsing-hsing-hsia, but had been forced to evacuate it, and were then withdrawing towards Hami, where all the Chinese forces in that district were being concentrated. He had thought himself safe so near Hami, but had been ambushed from both sides of the road.²

While he talked, a number of his men collected round and listened, gaping. Suddenly a shot fired from close by made the whole party start. But it was merely a soldier clumsily fingering the trigger of his rifle. "Idiot," said the Colonel, without turning his head, and was about to continue talking when a rapid fusillade started on the left, betokening a fresh attack, whereupon another officer, who had been hit under the collar-bone, refused to wait for the doctor's aid. Anxious to return to the fighting, he dug into his own flesh with a rusty knife and extracted a piece of lead. Then, while Delastre flushed the wound with iodine, he yelled to the men present to get back into the firing line, where he shortly joined them.

At that moment the Muhammadan cavalry charged again. This time, however, the Chinese had the advantage, their machine guns and one field-piece being well placed and ready for action. Meeting such unexpected resistance, the horsemen turned back. But one, possibly carried away by excitement, galloped blindly across the Chinese lines, where his mount was killed and he was unhorsed. Some of the Chinese infantrymen jumped on him, pinned him

¹ The lead bullets used by the Chanto make frightful wounds which generally cause death from hæmorrhage.

² The troops were exhausted by the 150-mile march across the desert, and the Colonel had not considered it necessary to post the usual flank guards.

to the ground, and two of them cut off his arms with long curved swords. A third ran his knife into the body—as a butcher rips open a sheep—plunged his arm deep into the warm entrails, tore out the heart and the liver and brandished them in the air as trophies. Another cut off the head, swung it round by the long black beard, and threw it away. Thus, before the eyes of the handful of horrified Europeans, were enacted scenes of a Central Asia which had not changed since the days of Genghis Khan or Tamerlane.

Immediately after this, up galloped a mounted Chinaman, feet turned out, elbows flapping and the barrel of his slung rifle beating against his neck. On reaching the Frenchmen, he fell, rather than dismounted, from his horse, dropped on his knees and kowtowed.

“Ehr Wu!” exclaimed Petro.

“Don’t be afraid, Master, they won’t find it. . . .”

“Won’t find what?”

“The petrol. I buried it.”

He then flung away rifle, cap, and bandolier, and tore off his uniform. Thus transformed into an ordinary coolie, he went up to one of the cars, produced a bit of rag and began polishing the wind-shield. He was a servant whom Petro had sent on with the supply caravan to Hsing-hsing-hsia.

“No one will find it,” continued Ehr Wu, rubbing frantically. “Before the town was evacuated I dug a deep hole in the ground and hid all the tins. Only the *Lao Tao* (Taoist priest) knows the place. Next day I was conscripted. But civil life for me!”

His torrent of talk was interrupted by cheers from the Chinese, for the advance guard of a relief column had arrived, and the road to Hami was open. At 5 p.m. the track-cars started towards that city and soon overtook and passed the marching troops, the infantry of which was

carried in enormous carts drawn by four or six mules.¹ This time the commander was taking no chances, and his flanks were protected by cavalry patrols. At about nine the Expedition pitched its camp under the city walls. And by that time Point, who had pressed on ahead in a lorry, was already in touch with the local authorities.

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The approaches to Hami were guarded, and the city itself was in a state of turmoil, feverishly organising its defences. The streets, which were rivers of mud after the rain, were blocked by military convoys, camel-caravans, mounted men, and armed soldiers of all kinds. The shops were closed, and through half-shut doors peered the anxious faces of Muhammadans. Hanging from a telegraph pole were the head, heart, and liver of a rebel.

In striking contrast with the confusion outside was the order and quietness of the *yamen* (the Military Headquarters), where the *Chu Ta-jên*,² or High Commissioner for Pacification and Commander-in-Chief of the Sinkiang Forces in Hami, received Point. A spare but dignified veteran of eighty-two, his keen glance showed a spirit that time could not touch. He was a mandarin of the old school, and one of those officials who, from the Han dynasty until the present day, have succeeded in upholding the prestige without which the Chinese could never have governed the Barbarians outside the Great Wall.³

"Your Honourable Expedition," he said politely, "has arrived here at an unfortunate moment. The Chantos are behaving like children and have actually had the temerity to attack us. I shall soon restore order, but the situation may cause you a certain amount of inconvenience."

¹ In Sinkiang the troops generally have to cross large stretches of desert, and the infantry is always transported in carts.

² *Ta-jên* means literally "Big Man," and corresponds to the title of Excellency.

³ Even now, outside the Great Wall, everybody calls the Chinese *Han-jên*—"sons of Han."

Point explained that his chief, Mr. Haardt, was expected in Kashgar at an early date, and that, in order not to keep him waiting, the China Group must continue its journey despite all risks.

"I have no authority to detain you," answered the Chu Ta-jên, "and the Governor-General at Urumchi is, I know, anxious to see you. The courage that has brought you so far may enable you to overcome the difficulties which lie ahead. But I cannot help you. All that I can do, since you are determined to proceed, is to advise you to the best of my ability. You are strangers in no way concerned with our family quarrels, so go to the young Prince Pei Sir, who may give you useful information. I hear that several Chinese gentlemen are taking part in your venture. Though I have not the honour of knowing their names, I have no doubt that they are very illustrious scientists." Rising to show that the interview was over, he added, "I hope to have the pleasure of seeing them as soon as possible."

The young Prince, or, as he proved to be, the Duke Pei Sir, whose advice seemed to be so indispensable for the continuation of the journey, lived in the Muhammadan city five hundred yards outside Hami. He was the last scion of a princely family which had reigned over the kingdom of Kumul since 1698.¹ Up to the death of his grandfather, the venerable and wise Shah Mahsud, the Princes of Kumul, although vassals to the Chinese Emperors, had enjoyed complete independence in the government of their domains. They collected taxes, maintained an armed force, administered justice and exercised the power of life and death over their subjects. Since the Chinese revolution of 1911, the Governor-General of Sinkiang had sought to abolish this privileged State, and,

¹ The kingdom of Kumul extended from the Mongol Plateau on the east to the vicinity of Turfan on the west. On the north it was bordered by the Karlik Tagh mountains and on the south by the Chol Tagh desert. (In Turki Chol means desert and Tagh mountain).

by substituting a Chinese administration in place of that of the princes, to suppress the semi-independence of the Chantos of Kumul. When old Prince Mahsud died, therefore, the Governor-General invited his heir, Prince Nazar, the father of Pei Sir, to come to Urumchi to discuss questions of State. He then held him prisoner, and the Chinese officials at Hami at once took over the control of local affairs, at the same time promising a great reduction of taxes.

Trusting to these promises, the Muhammadans submitted to this régime. The high-handedness of the new authorities, however, soon became unbearable. And, though certain taxes were reduced, the total was heavier than before. Moreover, the inhabitants had now to appeal to the Chinese courts instead of having their disagreements settled by their own prince. New laws and the confusion in the courts, where proceedings were carried on in Chinese without being properly interpreted, provoked many misunderstandings and caused universal discontent. But it was the abuses of the soldiery which brought matters to a head. A few months after the arrest of Prince Nazar, the Muhammadans of Kumul revolted, abandoned their farms, and sought refuge in the mountains. As they were not strong enough to fight alone against the better armed Chinese, they sought the aid and protection of Mâ Chung-ying, a Tungan general in the Chinese army.¹ As he was just preparing for his raid on Sinkiang, he accepted with alacrity this alliance which so favoured his own plans. Crossing the 325 miles of desert which separate Ansi from Hami, he, with 4,000 men, joined the Chanto forces the very day that the Expedition arrived at Hami.²

The Duke Pei Sir did not dare openly to join the rebellion, for he feared that his father Nazar, who was still

¹ See page 139.

² It was Mâ Chung-ying's advance guard which had attacked the Chinese troops at Yi K'o Shu.

a prisoner at Urumchi, would suffer for it. He was a young man in poor health, lacking energy and force of character ; and to Point he could guarantee nothing, except to promise that he would send a messenger ahead of the Expedition to inform all and sundry that its members were his honoured guests. To assure the safety of the caravan (No. 5) which had been left behind, he advised Point to ask General Chu for a *huchao* (pass), and gave him his visiting card.

It was imperative to save this caravan, which had by now probably reached the danger-zone, because it carried all the spare parts for the return journey to Peking. With this object it was arranged that Petro, with Gombo and Pô, should remain at Hami with one of the lorries which had a broken clutch-casing. They would overtake the others somewhere near Turfan so soon as it was repaired.

The day before the Expedition departed General Chu received its members in his *yamen*. While tea was being served, Mr. Yuan, Adviser to the General, took Dr. Tsu Ming-yi aside and led him into the garden. After showing his visitor the flowers, trees, and the ornamental pool which served also as a reservoir for the fortress, he explained the reason for this private talk. The General had received instructions from the Governor-General at Urumchi, which, though probably the result of a misunderstanding, were none the less definite. They were :

(1) To send the French to Urumchi instead of allowing them to proceed to Kashgar.

(2) To arrest all the Chinese members of the Expedition and search their baggage.

(3) To send all written documents found in possession of the Expedition to the Governor-General for examination.

(4) To keep its members under strict guard pending the result of his investigation.

He added that General Chu, being a true Chinese patriot, considered it derogatory to the dignity of the nation to arrest in the presence of foreigners such important personages as Dr. Tsu Ming-yi and his colleagues. He therefore begged Dr. Tsu not to mention this confidential warning to anyone but to think it over. It would help him to decide on a course of action when he reached Urumchi.¹

The Expedition duly left Hami on the 1st July. As Li had suspected, the stock of petrol previously deposited there had been "borrowed" by the military authorities, and only lubricating oil remained. The precaution of taking on board at Suchow sufficient petrol to reach Turfan was amply justified.² Petro remained behind, as arranged. He had already sent old Pô to meet the approaching caravan and had moved with Gombo to a house inside the city. He expected, when saying farewell, to catch up his companions at Turfan in four day's time. Little did he know what was in store for him.

With the Duke's *laissez-passer* the Expedition should have been able to cross the Chanto lines in safety, unescorted ; but General Chu had insisted on sending with them an extra passenger—a colonel, who carried an important message to the Governor-General.³ This was contrary to the neutral character of the Expedition, and Point feared that his presence, together with that of the Chinese scientists, might compromise it in the eyes of the rebels. But the day passed without incident, and by night-fall seventy miles had been covered along the chain of oases which runs parallel to the Karlik Tagh and the Barkul Shan Mountains.

¹ Four months later, Mr. Yuan himself repeated this conversation to one of the members of the Expedition.

² Turfan is 280 miles west of Hami.

³ As Hami was cut off from all communication with the capital, General Chu seized this opportunity of sending an officer to report its critical situation to the Governor-General.

For the first time the peculiar geological structure of the famous Tian Shan Lu (the road south of the Tian Shan Mountains), by way of Hami, Turfan, Aksu, and Kashgar revealed itself. To the north was a range of snow-clad heights with an unbroken, almost straight line of crests. At their foot lay a belt of Piedmont gravels—a sterile glacis about twenty miles wide. Lower down stretched a zone of *loess* ten to thirty miles wide, with a subterranean water-table below, which formed the chain of fertile and inhabited oases. To the south a series of desert depressions (Lop or Taklamakan) extended as far as the foot-hills of the Tibetan plateau. The oases had been ravaged by the fighting of the past few months ; and the formerly prosperous villages were now abandoned. What with the ruined houses, torn-down doors and trampled gardens, the countryside appeared more desolate than the desert, and the few remaining telegraph poles only served as reminders of the inability of modern civilisation to take permanent root in regions which are fundamentally barbarous.

Though no Chanto outposts were to be seen, they were certainly not far off, and prudence dictated a halt before nightfall. Camp was pitched near the deserted village of San-tao-ling-tsze.¹ During dinner, which as a matter of precaution was served without lights, the scientists, who so far had never on their own initiative either organised a guard or taken a watch, exhibited marked nervousness. Having repeatedly protested against the carrying of arms by the Expedition, they now wished to borrow rifles. They continually woke Point during the night to warn him that horsemen were prowling round the camp. Although he might have reminded them that, in accordance with the agreement made at Suchow, his authority was no longer recognised by the Chinese Delegation, and that Dr. Tsu

¹ Called Taranchi in Turki. The villages in this region all have a Chinese and a Turki name. This sometimes rather complicates the reading of maps and reports.

was responsible for taking all measures requisite for its safety, he contented himself with advising them to hide in the cars, while he himself undertook sentry duty. Actually no Chantos materialised ; and the Chinese breathed more freely.

But their peace of mind was short-lived, for no sooner had a start been made next morning than a score of mounted men appeared on the nearest height. It was impossible to distinguish their features. All that could be seen were tall figures wrapped in long caftans, mounted on small cobby horses, their rifles and rifle-rests showing up clearly against the sky.¹ Point, who, with Li, was at the head of the column, stopped his lorry and got out, rifle in hand. Ostentatiously laying his weapon on the ground, he took a few steps towards the horsemen, one of whom—white-bearded and apparently the chief—dismounted, and did likewise.

“ Salaam Alaikum ! . . . ”

“ Salaam,” replied Point, putting his fingers to his lips as a sign that he could not talk without an interpreter. He beckoned to Li, who immediately burst into a torrent of Chinese explaining the situation. The old man interrupted him with a wave of his hand.

“ Chirik ? ” (“ Soldiers ? ” in Turki).

Li quickly shook his head, “ Fa Kuo ” (“ French ”—in Chinese), and he held out Pei Sir’s card.

If the restricted conversation did not advance matters much, the visiting card was certainly effective.

“ Maa Salamme ! ” (“ Go in peace ! ”)

The chief promptly drew his men up on one side of the road, and the cars passed on. The figures of these rude horsemen, descendants of the Uigur conquerors, and the last to defend the shreds of their independence against the

¹ Most of the rebels were highlanders of the Karlik Tagh, professional hunters who always attach a sort of fork to the barrels of their rifles as an aiming rest.

Chinese, remained in sight for a long time, motionless against the rosy glow of the rising sun.

To the west, a ridge of the Bogdo Ola, thrusting a tongue into the desert, barred the plain. At the foot of the mountains the road meandered between enormous blocks of rock and climbed up through the narrow Liao Tung gorges. At the summit of the pass, at an altitude of 4,400 feet, there was a fresh alarm. Armed men again barred the way—this time Chinese soldiers, outposts of the Sinkiang army which had been sent to quell the rebellion. At the order of the colonel from Hami, who retained his presence of mind, the soldiers saluted and let the Expedition pass. Twelve miles farther down, at Chi-ku-ching-tzse (Seven Bitter Wells), was the headquarters of the Sinkiang troops—10,000 men under the command of General Liu. Here the colonel took leave of Point, deciding to remain so that he could telegraph his report to the Governor-General. He promised to inform the latter how greatly the Expedition had helped the Chinese cause by convoying him across the rebel lines. Point took advantage of the telegraph to send his respects to the Governor-General, and Dr. Tsu Ming-yi, in collaboration with his colleagues, composed a long despatch. At this place the road forked into two branches. To the left was the direct way to Turfan and Kashgar, to the right that to Urumchi. Point took the left branch, rather to the perturbation of General Yao who was expecting to go to Urumchi. It was explained to him that that place would be visited on the return journey.

To escape from the giant punch-bowl of Chi-ku-ching-tzse it was necessary to cross two high passes. Beyond the second an enormous plain unfolded itself to the south and west—the Turfan depression. From an altitude of 4,400 feet the road descended to the first oasis, Chiktam, at an

altitude of 1,530 feet. Farther down was Pichan, at 1,036 feet, Lukchun at 488, and then, at 85 feet below sea level, came Turfan. The heat in this basin—bordered on the north by the formidable chain of the Celestial Mountains—was intolerable, a temperature of 40° in the shade being regarded as quite low. As the Expedition descended, the thermometer rose to 45°, 48°, 50°. The ruts and holes in the road were filled with a deep layer of fine dust, which was stirred up by the passing cars and hung in the following wind like a fog. Everyone felt suffocated and endured tortures from thirst.

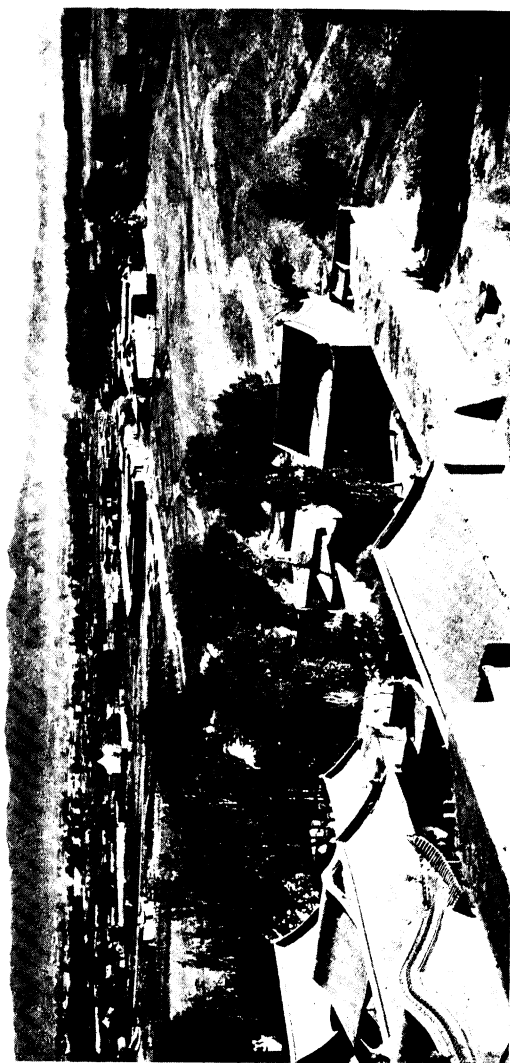
At Pichan a crowd of inhabitants in long white shirts, with embroidered skull caps on their heads, surrounded the cars, hawking melons and grapes. These people were also Chantos, but, being cut off by the desert, they were not involved in the conflict raging to the north. Here were orchards, vineyards, gardens with running water, herds, shops and markets. In these fertile spots everything was suggestive of a lotus-eating existence, though one perpetually threatened by the ruthless encroachment of the desert.

At noon on the 5th July the Expedition arrived at Turfan. Kashgar was now 800 miles away—only two weeks' journey—if all went well. But everything went wrong. First, a peremptory telegram—almost an order—from Governor-General King summoned both the French and the Chinese members of the Expedition to Urumchi.

Point, who had now reassumed command of the Group, decided to go on to Urumchi taking Dr. Tsu, General Yao and Colonel Tiao, Chauvet, with his lorry, and Li, to act as interpreter. Foreseeing, when in Hami, the possible importance of his future functions, the last named had had his visiting cards engraved : “ Mr. Li Yu-ling, *Secretary* of the Sino-French Expedition ” !

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Before setting off, Point gave Brull, who was to remain



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URUMCHI IN SUMMER

in charge at Turfan, definite instructions that, no matter what means the Governor-General should employ to make him go to Urumchi, he was not to move without written orders from himself. At Turfan seven days passed—days of waiting, trying days. Everyone was enervated by the heat, and some were further weakened by dysentery brought on by a too generous diet of fruit, following a long period of tinned food. The suspense told on all, and they grew more and more impatient and anxious to get away, and to learn what had happened to Point, to Haardt, to Petro.

On the 14th the Hsien Chang (the magistrate), who was always friendly and hospitable, called on Brull. Knowing that it was the French National Holiday, he had brought four bottles of Crimean champagne ; but when pressed to stay for lunch he seemed embarrassed, though he eventually consented to do so. At table Brull tried to make him talk, Mr. Liu acting as interpreter, but the magistrate confined himself to such non-committal topics as the temperature and the abnormal rainfall at Turfan of four years previously. At the end of the meal, to the strains of the “Marseillaise,” toasts were drunk to the health of the President of the French Republic and the President of the Sinkiang Provincial Government.

Kashgar seemed to be almost within sight ! The Chinese official then took two telegrams out of his pocket ; and the cause of his reluctance to accept hospitality became apparent.

“ I am much distressed,” he said, unfolding one of them, “ to have to perform a painful duty. First, I must verify your passports. Secondly, I must take over all your arms, ammunition and exposed photographic plates and films. Thirdly, I must examine carefully the contents of your baggage. And lastly, I must request you to proceed at once to Urumchi.”

The general gaiety abated suddenly. To Brull's protest

and enquiry as to the reason for these disciplinary measures, the magistrate replied that the Governor-General had been greatly pained to receive a telegraphic report from Hami stating that the members of the Expedition had photographed and filmed scenes of fighting which were derogatory to the national dignity of China.

As the authorities at Hami had received the Expedition in a polite and friendly manner, and as the wire between that place and Urumchi was broken, it was evident that this report to the Governor-General must have emanated from some other source. Who could have been responsible for it? Certainly not the extra passenger, who was so grateful to the French for having saved his life, that he would never have used this or any pretext to influence the powerful master of Sinkiang against them. Who then could it be—if not the scientists who had accompanied Point and who were now actually in Urumchi?

The second telegram was then solemnly read out. It was a message of congratulation from these very men—Dr. Tsu, General Yao and Colonel Tiao on the occasion of the French National Holiday ! The veiled irony of these good wishes did not escape Brull, and his suspicion became conviction.

At noon on the 16th Chauvet arrived unexpectedly in a Chinese lorry, under a guard of soldiers. He was immediately surrounded by his comrades and to Brull he handed a confidential message. "Proceed with everybody to Urumchi at once. Do not enter the city, but camp outside the suburbs until I come. Victor Point."

CHAPTER IX

THE CAMP OF STAUNCH RESISTANCE

The China Group arrives at Urumchi—Marshal King's policy—The Man in the Bowler Hat—Wireless *versus* Gramophone—The bargain.

SUSPENSE GAVE WAY to curiosity when Chauvet arrived ; and he had his work cut out to reply to the questions showered upon him. Urumchi certainly was not—Paris ! But he had not had the opportunity of sampling all its attractions, as his personal liberty had been much curtailed, and his footsteps dogged. Chinese hospitality was strange and full of contradictions. To welcome a man with military honours in the morning and lock him up in the evening was one of its perplexing manifestations.

Point had been received with a salute of guns and invited to a gala luncheon at which His Excellency the Governor-General of Sinkiang had congratulated him on the success of his courageous journey, and at the end of the banquet, which lasted for over three hours, wished him “Bon Voyage” to Kashgar. After this cordial reception the three Chinese declared that they would not go on, but would await Haardt's arrival at Urumchi. Point made up his mind to return straightway to Turfan ; but, when he tried to open the gates of the inn where he had left the lorry, he found his way barred by a pair of sentries.

A few minutes later, an extraordinary individual wearing a bowler hat appeared at the inn. “I am Mr. Chen”—he panted—“the Chinese Commissioner for Foreign Affairs

in Sinkiang. The Governor-General wishes you to stay here a few days in order to talk over certain important matters. As the discussion may take some time, His Excellency has expressed a strong desire for all the members of the Expedition to assemble here before the conversations are started."

"I see no need for them to come," replied Point.

"Those are His Excellency's orders. I advise you just to think things over. In the meantime, be good enough to deliver up your arms." Placing a sentry at the door, Mr. Chen departed.

And from then onwards, each day, morning and evening, one of the Marshal's secretaries presented himself to enquire the result of Point's meditations. That young officer, separated from his companions, without news of his chief, and unable to communicate with the outside world, became more and more anxious as he realised that further resistance would only prolong a situation from which he saw no issue. On the tenth day, exasperated by a loss of liberty which deprived him of all power of action, he agreed to send Chauvet to Turfan with a written message to Brull to tell him to come to Urumchi with the seven cars. It was tantamount to an order for the China Group to give themselves up as prisoners.

Upon receiving the message Brull at once ordered preparations to be made for departure. These were carried out with alacrity, for, though the future was anything but reassuring, the whole party was eager to escape from the horrible heat-trap in which they had been pent up. And when next morning they climbed the summit of the "Fire Mountains"—a red sandstone ridge near Turfan—their spirits rose at the sight of the high blue mountains to the north. But one more descent had to be made and a sun-baked gravel plain crossed before the foot-hills of the Bogdo Ola could be reached. In the evening, at an altitude

of 3,000 feet, it was again possible to breathe. The sick—some of the men were still suffering from dysentery—naturally felt better, with the exception of Gustave Kégresse—the “Benjamin” of the mechanics, whose condition steadily grew worse.¹ During the night Delastre diagnosed the trouble as a serious attack of appendicitis. He did not think an immediate operation imperative, though he insisted that the patient should be carried in the hospital-car as far as Urumchi, where further measures could be decided upon.

There was another problem. The Turfan authorities had taken away, and placed under seal, all the arms of the Expedition, with the exception of two light automatics,² which had been concealed under a trailer. Chauvet was not at all happy about these guns, for the Chinese at Urumchi were very thorough in their search. His own lorry had been gone through by two Russian mechanics who missed nothing, looking under the cushions and even sounding the petrol-tanks. It was finally settled that the best plan was to bury the guns before reaching Urumchi. But this had to be done under the nose of the Chinese controller, who was acting as escort, and so next day the mechanic of the wireless car dropped behind, pretending that he had engine trouble, dug a hole and buried the guns at a spot easily marked.

The old cart-road climbed over the last pass of the Bogdo Ola and then plunged down to the Dzungarian Plateau, where the going was easy. At Davan-chin, on the other side of the mountains, Kégresse grew worse. Delastre prescribed ice ; and Chauvet, who knew that it was procurable at Urumchi, went ahead in his lorry at full speed to get some, while the rest of the convoy halted, so that the

¹ Nephew of Adolphe Kégresse, the well-known inventor of the Kégresse caterpillar-track.

² These light automatics, for which the Expedition possessed proper permits, proved to be very useful six months later, when it was attacked by bandits near the bend of the Yellow River.

patient could rest. Fortunately it was cooler. At over 3,000 feet above sea-level and protected by high mountains from the scorching breath of the Taklamakan, the Dzungarian Plateau was in a more temperate zone. Long, luxuriant grass waved in the fresh breeze. The sky seemed brighter, and, in the clear exhilarating atmosphere, the heat and discomfort of the southern deserts were quickly forgotten. It was a new aspect of Central Asia—still vast, but no longer hostile. In the evening Chauvet returned with the ice—though without news of Point, whom he had not been allowed to see. Camp was pitched near a small lake five miles from Urumchi.

The question now to be settled was whether it was better to go closer to the city or to wait at this spot. Point's instructions were clear—"Camp outside the suburbs." But the doctor insisted that his patient must be taken to some place where he could have hospital treatment, and the Chinese controller assured Brull that a house was ready awaiting the party in Urumchi itself. At eight o'clock the following morning (the 19th July), as there was no sign from Point, the cavalcade moved on. Just as it was entering the suburbs, a horseman in shirt-sleeves dashed out of the city and made signs for it to halt. Bare-headed, unshaven, with the perspiration pouring down his face, he was barely recognisable as Point. "Turn about and follow me!" he shouted. And, despite the protests of the controller, the convoy, led by Point, extricated itself from the suburbs and skirted the city walls until it reached a hill with a commanding view, where it halted in a small grove near a temple.

"Dismantle the track-bands and the running gear. Quick!" were Point's next instructions. "The Marshal wants to grab the whole of our equipment. If you had gone on into the town he would have done so by now. We've had a close shave!"

Ten minutes later, when a company of breathless Chinese

infantry came up at the double, all the seven cars were sitting on their axles on the ground. The soldiers were followed by a number of officials : the Commissioner for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Chen ; the Chief of Police ; the Garrison Commander ; the Chief of the Secret Police ; the Superintendent of Customs ; the Director of the Wireless Station ; and the Director of the Automobile Park, accompanied by two Russian chauffeurs. Dr. Tsu Mingy-i and General Yao brought up the rear.

Mr. Chen opened the ball : " His Excellency desires the members of the Expedition to occupy the quarters that have been assigned to them in the city."

" I regret," answered Point, with a gesture of helplessness, " that my drivers are too ill to be moved."

He made a sign to the delegation to follow him into the temple, where on three camp cots set in a row were lying Reymond, Remillier and Nuret, all greatly weakened by their recent attacks of dysentery. As for Kégresse, his emaciation and pallor were evidence of his serious state.

" We will lend you some chauffeurs to drive the cars," Mr. Chen insisted.

" Unfortunately our cars cannot be moved either."

Upon being consulted, the Russian chauffeurs admitted that they were not competent to re-assemble the driving mechanism. Thereupon the officials made a thorough search of the camp and departed, the Garrison Commander placing a strong guard with fixed bayonets over the cars.

The bivouac had become a detention camp.

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The attitude of the Governor-General of Sinkiang seemed so illogical that it suggested some strong ulterior motive.¹ But if so, what ?

The Province of Sinkiang is to-day all that remains of

¹ In granting passports to Haardt in 1929, Marshal King had stated that he would do everything in his power to help the Expedition.

the immense Chinese colonial empire, which, less than two centuries ago, included such large dominions as Tibet, Indo-China and Burma. Twice as large as France, the district is inhabited by fourteen different races. The mandarins who administer it never fail to mention this fact with a certain pride, because, in spite of the efforts of the Government to encourage immigration from the Central Provinces, the Chinese in Sinkiang consist chiefly of a few officials, soldiers and merchants. But the smallness of their number—about five per cent—in comparison with the bulk of the population, has not prevented them from governing these heterogeneous races with wisdom and firmness. This moral supremacy, which was gained by prestige rather than force, became difficult to maintain after the Chinese Revolution of 1911. Then, only a policy of complete isolation could save Sinkiang from the anarchy which spread over the rest of China.

The former Governor-General, Yang, and his successor, Marshal King, understood this, and events proved them right. While China proper was ravaged by civil wars, its trade paralysed by arbitrary taxation, and its roads were infested by bandits, in Sinkiang, in spite of one tentative invasion planned by Fêng Yu-hsiang¹ in 1928, civil war was unknown,² the roads were safe, bandits unheard of, and commerce, unhampered by internal barriers, flourished throughout the province.

China had not known such peace and prosperity since the memorable reign of Emperor Ch'ien Lung more than a century earlier. To preserve this state of affairs in Sinkiang, it was necessary to prevent the spread of liberal ideas of Western origin, and of the parliamentarianism evangelised by Sun Yat-sen, which in place of welding together the living forces of the Chinese Republic into

¹ Known as the "Christian General." Driven from the coast by Marshal Chang Tso-lin, he invaded Kansu and tried to extend his rule over Sinkiang.

² The Muhammadan rebellion at Hami, although important, was local.

nationalism had so far only destroyed them. As these ideas could find their way into the Province only through newspapers, private correspondence or verbal information brought by travellers, Marshal King, like a benevolent tyrant, solved what seemed to him a simple problem in a simple way. To prevent the dissemination of news through the Press, he built in his *yamen* a stove in which all imported printed matter was burnt, the *Official Sinkiang Gazette* being in his view sufficient to satisfy the legitimate intellectual demands of the population. All letters were opened and read ; and telegrams were held up for a month, by which time they had become valueless. There remained only the question of dealing with travellers. The difficulty of obtaining permission to enter or to leave the Province was such as to discourage most of the Chinese ; and those who were allowed to cross the frontier were subjected to a period of strict observation.

In regard to foreign travellers the Marshal acted with the greatest circumspection. He did not consider them specially dangerous, but their presence generally proved a nuisance, and their objects always seemed suspect. One visitor, for example, had pretended that he wanted to visit the ruins of dead cities in order to excavate Buddhist sculpture. Now, of what interest could Buddha be to a Christian—if not as a pretext for searching for buried treasure ? Another, a Swede, explained that he wished to verify the actual situation of the Lop Nor, which had, he thought, returned to the position assigned to it on ancient Chinese maps after having for fourteen centuries been a degree of latitude farther south !¹ What possible importance could Sweden attach to this question ? A third had alleged that his desire was to climb an inaccessible mountain, in order to “measure its height,” and added that three of his compatriots had lost their lives in Northern

¹ See Appendix I.

India in a similar attempt to ascend the highest peak on earth. A likely story !

However, the Marshal admitted that the purpose of the French Expedition was at least comprehensible. The fact that it was equipped with automobiles and wireless proved that it was really a " scientific mission " ; and the name of its sponsor, a great captain of industry, left no doubt that it came to Sinkiang for a perfectly good reason, namely, to " do business " and sell equipment.

It so happened that at that moment Sinkiang was sorely in need of some form of mechanisation for improving its internal communications—which were slow and difficult owing to the huge tracts of desert. The task of administering and controlling remote districts of the Province would obviously be much facilitated by the use of motor-vehicles capable of crossing the sand-dunes, and by the installation of efficient wireless-stations. Moreover, though the passage of the Gobi Desert by the French Expedition, with its heavy transport, opened the eyes of the Governor-General to a new danger—that of a sudden invasion across a frontier which he had hitherto regarded as inviolable—it also showed the attractive possibility of a new trade outlet which might to some extent discount the existing commercial domination of Russia in his territory. Marshal King had taken all these points into consideration when, in 1929, he had granted Haardt permission to enter Sinkiang and had, with traditional Chinese courtesy, which, by the way, was perfectly sincere, promised him his aid and support.

His attitude changed only in April, 1931, when he was advised by his representative in Peking that a delegation of Chinese scientists had joined the French. Up till then there had never been any question of Chinese accompanying them. The affair had now become complicated, and it was necessary to find a pretext for putting off the

departure of the Expedition. So, when a comparatively small number of Muhammadans revolted in the Hami district, he telegraphed, advising that the journey be postponed on account of "numerous bandits who were roaming in the uncultivated area on the outskirts of Kansu."¹ But his warning was ignored, and a few days later, he heard that the Expedition was actually crossing the Gobi. He also learned that its Chinese members were not scientists, as had been given out, but important political personages, and that their leader, Dr. Tsu Ming-yi, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Kuomintang, had announced to the Press that he was going to Sinkiang to inspect the local *Tang-pu* or party cells. The presence of the two senior Chinese military officers only increased his apprehension. He therefore sent a second telegram to inform the Chinese that they could not enter Sinkiang without his permission, and instructed General Chu to stop them at the border.

When he heard that in spite of his orders the entire party, French and Chinese, had arrived at Turfan, his fury knew no bounds ; and he ordered them all to go to Urumchi without delay, so that he might investigate matters. When only four members arrived they were received with full honours, because custom ordains that important personages must be paid the marks of esteem due to their rank. His Excellency would never have forgiven himself if he had not entertained his guests properly at an official meal, even though he might for the good of the State be compelled to have them decapitated at dessert. Politeness first ! Business next ! This explains why the Marshal, being unwilling to admit that a young Frenchman had dared to disobey his orders, had from courtesy wished him a formal "*bon voyage*" to Kashgar

¹ See page 52. The Marshal had not thought it worth while to make known that it was not a matter of bandits in Kansu but a Muhammadan revolution.

and at the same time taken measures to prevent him going. He regarded this as the easiest way of compelling Point to summon the rest of the Group to Urumchi. Only then would he consider on what conditions the foreigners should be permitted to continue their journey.

The case of the Chinese members was more delicate. He would probably eventually send them back to China, but he wished first to find out their real reasons for coming to Sinkiang, for the explanations they gave did not ring true. Dr. Tsu Ming-yi declared that, being a good patriot, he had undertaken the journey to become better acquainted with the country. General Yao said that he was the representative of Marshal Chiang Kai-shek, the President of the Republic of China, his mission being to present to Marshal King a sword of honour and a signed portrait of the latter. The attitude and conversation of the General Staff Officer—Colonel Tiao—showed him to be tactless rather than dangerous.

When the Marshal reminded the delegation—not without irony—that he had warned them before they started of the risks involved in so hazardous an enterprise, the Doctor replied: "We are greatly indebted to Your Excellency for the wise counsel you have been kind enough to offer us on more than one occasion. We would certainly have followed your advice if we had not been compelled by a patriotic sense of duty to come on here at all risks to inform Your Excellency of certain suspicions aroused during this journey, which have been confirmed by subsequent events. At first I thought that the object and purpose of the Frenchmen were purely scientific. But I soon began to have doubts, as Lieutenant-Commander Point, though informed by Your Excellency and the local authorities at Suchow of the trouble at Hami, insisted—after having communicated by telegram with the leader

of the insurgents, Mâ Chung-ying ¹—on crossing the rebel lines. A week later, in the very centre of the rebellion, at Hami, he actually established contact with the Muhammadan rebels through the intermediation of the Duke Pei Sir. From this I suspected that there might be some connection between the Chanto rebellion in Hami and the French foreign policy. You will note that the real leader of the Expedition, Ha Erh Te (Haardt), intends to enter Sinkiang after having passed through all the Muhammadan countries of the West—Syria, Iraq, Persia, Afghanistan and Kashmir.

“All this has led us to the logical conclusion that France is pursuing in Asia a pro-Islamic policy, with the object of detaching Sinkiang from its mother-country and of setting up an independent Muhammadan State. On my arrival at Suchow, therefore, I thought it desirable to bring certain facts to the attention of the Nanking Government, and to request that the passports of the Expedition be cancelled and its members conducted under escort to the nearest frontier.”

The Marshal agreed that this theory was very interesting ; but suggested that it was strange that so small and distant a country as France should have such inordinate ambitions. Nevertheless, as he had been informed by the Nanking Government on the previous day that the passports of the Expedition had been cancelled, he added that there was no need for the Doctor to trouble himself any further in the matter : “There is no longer any question of French activity in Sinkiang, and you can therefore consider that your mission has been successfully accomplished. You must be anxious to return to Nanking, where most important duties doubtless await you ; and the Soviet Authorities have assured me that they will facilitate your journey there via Siberia.” Then, without giving

¹ See page 158.

Dr. Tsu time to recover, he added : " Do not let any question of the expense of the journey disturb you. That will be my affair."

The result of this interview was, on the whole, satisfactory to both parties. Dr. Tsu Ming-yi and his colleagues were not displeased at finding without " loss of face " a way out of a situation which might easily have ended disastrously. As for the Marshal, he was only too glad to be rid so easily of these troublesome emissaries, whose real reasons for visiting his province were so obscure.¹

But, though he had been officially notified of the cancellation of the passports and had received orders to deport the members of the Expedition, he was in no hurry to act. His need for modern war material had now become urgent. The rebellion had assumed disquieting proportions ; all communication between the capital and Hami had been cut off—complete ignorance reigned as to what was happening there—and the troops sent to restore order were unable to advance beyond Chi-ku-ching-tsze. But with track-cars which could cross the Gobi it might be possible to reach Hami rapidly by making a detour south of the enemy lines through the Chol Tagh,² which in summer cannot be negotiated even with the aid of camels. Moreover, the installation of a portable wireless-post at the headquarters of his forces in the field would enable him to direct operations from Urumchi.³ To do this it was only necessary to force Point to bring his equipment to that place, and it was with this in view that he had held him prisoner for a week. But upon confirmation of the fact that the Group had actually left Turfan he had

¹ These conversations were reported later by an official in the immediate *entourage* of the Marshal.

² This was proved possible three months later when Petro, escaping from Hami, followed this route.

³ There were already two wireless-stations at Urumchi. One was a Marconi long-wave station which was out of order, the other a short-wave station which was in daily communication with Mukden.

released him and given orders for billets to be prepared in the military automobile park within the city.

But, as we have seen, Point was suspicious of these arrangements and had set up his camp outside the city walls, thus frustrating the Marshal's first move. Here, in the company of his friends and in comparative freedom, which was pleasant after a week of confinement, he recovered confidence and again became hopeful of the future. It was true that the Expedition was held up, but with perseverance all difficulties might be overcome. Long ago, in Paris, Monseigneur de Guébriant, the Superior of the Foreign Catholic Mission, had told him that in China it does not pay to be in a hurry, and that travellers who are in haste never arrive.

Fortunately there was plenty of time, but it was necessary at once to inform Haardt, who had been without news of the China Group for three weeks, that there might be a long delay. It was not easy to do this, for ever since the arrival at Turfan the use of the Expedition's wireless had been strictly prohibited, and the Government telegraph and wireless administration had been forbidden to transmit any messages from the French. To communicate by wireless secretly appeared impossible because the mast for the aerial and the noise of the motor would immediately draw attention to what was being attempted.

On the 21st July Mr. Chen paid the Expedition another visit. Wearing satin slippers and the famous bowler hat, he arrived in a carriage drawn by two Russian trotters, and Point knew from experience that his amiable smile and conventional attitude boded no good. Sipping a cup of Fukien tea, he expatiated for ten minutes on the merits of that growth which, he said, kept the stomach cool in the heat of summer, whereas the red tea from Honan, being more heating, was better suited to winter. Finally he came to the point :

"I am instructed by the Marshal to inform you that your passports have been cancelled by the Nanking Government and that he has received orders to send you under escort to the frontier." He took a deep breath, "Nevertheless, everything can still be arranged, as the Governor-General is the competent authority to decide if it is advisable to carry out a measure that falls within his jurisdiction. Your cars," he coughed slightly, "especially the wireless-car, would be useful at army headquarters for communicating between the capital and the front. I am sure the Governor would be much gratified if you could place the latter, a driver and a wireless-operator at his disposal."

"That is quite impossible."

"May I remind you of the fact that we are merely asking for the equipment that you promised to bring us—three cars and three wireless-sets?"

"Mr. Haardt has fulfilled his promise," answered Point. "The plant was sent from France to Tientsin and is actually on its way here. I have heard that it left Liangchow three weeks ago. As soon as communications are re-opened, you will certainly have it."

"That may be so. But we are in urgent need of it now."

"Impossible. As we are foreigners we can take no part in your military operations, whether it is a case of rebellion or civil war. All I can do is to present the Marshal with a small portable receiving and sending set which may be of service to him."

Mr. Chen promised to report the conversation to the Marshal. "But I am afraid," he added as he was leaving, "that later on you will regret your attitude, as Ha Erh Te (Haardt), your Chief, has changed his plans. On learning that he would not be allowed to enter Sinkiang, he turned back and has left you to your fate."

This statement, made casually, but carefully thought

out in advance, increased Point's anxiety. He was sure that Haardt would never abandon the China Group to its fate ; but what could he do if, on crossing the Pamirs, he found the Sinkiang frontier closed to him ? The only man in Urumchi who could advise on the subject was Kierkegaard, a Dane, who happened to be the Chinese Postal Commissioner for the Province. He said he would do all he could to help, should the occasion arise, but advised an appeal to the Consul-General of the U.S.S.R., because only the Soviets had any real influence at Urumchi. It was doubtful whether the Russians would intervene favourably, since only a year previously Moscow had refused to allow the Expedition to pass through Russian Turkestan. The Consul-General was most polite, and said that he would be very pleased to take the matter up with the Sinkiang authorities but could do nothing without orders from Moscow. In reply to a request to send a telegram for the Expedition, he assumed a non-committal attitude, remarking that the Chinese telegraph service was not always very efficient, " But I am convinced that if you can communicate with Moscow through Paris, my Government will be pleased to be of assistance to you."

This strengthened Point's determination to get into contact with the outside world. The guard prevented open use of the wireless, so his only chance was to pit guile against force. When he learned that the Governor-General would be pleased to accept the portable 60-watt wireless-set, he took steps to have it adjusted for use with the existing Urumchi transmitting station, and, as the Chinese admitted their inability to do this, he arranged for Kervizic to make the necessary experiments. This was a heaven-sent opportunity. Kervizic chose for the trial an hour when he knew that the despatch-vessel *Regulus*, stationed at Hongkong, would be listening in. He purposely, therefore, made the call on a wrong wave-length for Urumchi,

which the Chinese operators, standing open-mouthed behind him, did not detect.

"FPCG . . . FPCG . . . from FBQR. FPCG . . . from FBQR."¹

"I've got her," he murmured, "it's the *Regulus*. She's calling . . . QPCF (We have several messages for you) . . . QSA (What is the strength of your signals?) . . . QRK (How do you hear us?) . . . QRU (Have you anything for us?)."

Finger on key, he replied feverishly with dots and dashes : "FBQR . . . from FPCG . . . Give TCF (Pass your traffic".)

But as soon as he began listening again, he realised that his reply had not been heard. The *Regulus* continued calling. QSA . . . QRK . . . QRU—tantalising questions which the small listening-post could hear, but to which its sixty watts could not reply sufficiently powerfully to carry over a distance of 4,000 miles.

It was clear that the larger 500-watt set would have to be used to communicate with the outside world. But the wireless-car was strictly guarded !

Still, the fate of the Expedition was at stake, and after dinner on the 23rd, Point summoned Brull, Penaud, Conté, Carl and Kervizic to his tent for a council of war, to devise some way of using the more powerful wireless without the knowledge of the Chinese. The aerial was easy to camouflage. The noise of the motor was the difficulty. Kervizic said that he could be locked up in the car to operate the installation, and it was arranged that while he did this Carl should divert the attention of the guards by a musical entertainment. The preparations for this were to be made next day, and action taken the day following.

The camp was pitched inside a square of tall poplars. On its western side stood a small temple, the other three sides, each about thirty yards long, being roped off to

¹ FPCG was the call sign of the China Group. FBQR that of the *Regulus*.

keep out the crowds. The wireless-car stood in the centre of the camp. Its body was divided into two compartments, one in front for the driver and passengers, and the other for the wireless. The latter had an independent entrance at the back which could be opened only from the outside, and which under normal conditions was left open when the installation was working. But it could also be entered by a sliding door between the two compartments. The current was supplied by a motor-generator placed on the ground outside.

It was essential to disguise this conspicuous lay-out and to eliminate the noise of the two-cycle motor, which would advertise even to the most ignorant that the wireless was being used. It was proposed to hide the generator under the front axle and run it by a belt off the fan of the engine, the cables also being concealed under the chassis. The necessary modifications for this were made within the twenty-four hours.

"But," said Brull, "they'll want to know why the engine of the car is being run in the evening. What excuse can we give?" "You forget the 'pick-up,'" answered Carl, who clung to his idea of a musical performance. "Don't we need current to boost that of the gramophone? Remember, it's to be an open-air concert, and we can say that the engine is supplying the current for the music."

The suggested concert offered another advantage. It would serve as an excuse for decorating the camp with flags strung from tree to tree, and with them the aerial could be set up. This idea, as might be expected of a "handy man," was Point's. On the evening of the 24th Kervizic climbed the nearest poplar and fixed a tackle to hoist the aerial. Next afternoon all was ready. Every man knew the part he had to play; the generator which was to supply current for both wireless and gramophone amplifier had been rigged up; the flags fluttered gaily; and—most important—the

suspensions of the Chinese soldiers had not been aroused. But Mr. Chen's spy, nicknamed the "Blue Man," scented something unusual, "Why the flags?"

"To celebrate the centenary of the Third Republic," answered Carl imperturbably.

At eight o'clock, profiting by a moment of inattention on the part of the sentries, Kervizic slipped through the sliding panel into the wireless cabin and carefully caulked any openings through which light might filter out. Conté took post at the steering-wheel, and Point, who was to transmit to him the signals from the operator, sat beside him. Both were hidden by the curtains. As everything had to be done in complete silence, Kervizic was to signal to Point by means of a string, one pull for "start"; two for "accelerate"; and three for "stop."

It was 8.30 p.m. and a fine evening. The loud-speaking gramophone was installed near the car, and close to it were Father Teilhard and Reymond, "standing by" to change the records. The loud-speaker was placed near Brull's tent as far away as possible from the car, and round it was assembled the audience for whose benefit the concert had so thoughtfully been organised.

One pull on the string—"start." The engine snorted, and out through the darkness floated a woman's sweet voice:

"... Ah ! Parlez-moi d'amour ..."

And at the same time began the click of the Morse key in the wireless cabin.

"... FBQR ... from FPCG ... QTC (urgent) ... FBQR ... from FPCG. ..."

Three frantic jerks—"Stop." Kervizic listened. By God ! Everyone was listening—in Tientsin, in Hongkong, in Shanghai, the ships of the Naval Squadron, the *Waldeck Rousseau*, the *Regulus*, even the French station at Chungking. Every time he passed to a different wave-length,

Kervizic heard a new call. The *Regulus* had six messages for him. It was the station that he heard best.

“ Ah ! Redites-moi des mots tendres . . . ”

The Chinese soldiers goggled in amazement at the magic horn from which a woman's voice was ringing out so clearly. Their eyes grew round. Even the chin of the “ Blue Man ” expressed surprise.

“ Damn . . . ” murmured Brull. He noticed strange noises intermingling with the words of love and tenderness crooned by the singer—Two dashes . . . Dot . . . Three dashes . . . Dash . . . Dot . . . The Morse code was popping out through the melody ! The mechanics also heard it and at once took up the refrain of the song. They shouted ; they danced ; they did all they could to drown the voice of the gramophone—“ Parlez-moi d'amour . . . ”

While the song went on, Kervizic spoke to the *Regulus* in brief words, but not those of love :

“ . . FBQR from FPCG. Legafrance, Peking. Are held at Urumchi. Please intercede for permission to send three cars to Kashgar to meet Haardt's Group. Governor threatens to requisition cars. Was personally held prisoner ten days. Victor Point.”

He stopped in panic, for it flashed through his mind that the Urumchi official station could easily intercept this message. So he added :

“ FPCG asks FBQR to pass all its traffic ‘in the air.’¹ We are being spied upon.”

Ten o'clock. “ Ladies and Gentlemen. The concert is over. We have the honour to thank you for your kind patronage.” Carl bowed ceremoniously. The engine stopped. The voice died down. Conté, hands in pockets, nonchalantly strolled up to his friends.

“ Well, what about it ? ” they asked.

¹ To pass the traffic in the air means to broadcast direct messages without contact with the receiving station. In this way Kervizic was certain of receiving messages in the future without being obliged to answer the calls.

“ Transmitted. *Regulus* has acknowledged on twenty-seven metres.”

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It must be admitted that at the end of July the position of the Expedition was none too favourable. Its papers were not in order, and the cancellation of its passports by Nanking, which deprived it of all legal status, precluded any protest to Marshal King. It was therefore imperative that the passports should be validated again, which could be done only by the French Legation.

The Legation acted without delay, as Point discovered on the 29th, when he received a message from Monsieur Wilden¹ :

“ Your radio of the 25th received. Haardt has been informed. All necessary steps will be taken. Hope that misunderstanding which grew to incredible proportions will be cleared up.”

Anxiety gave place to hope. All were confident that the intervention of the Legation would be efficacious ; and simultaneously the attitude of the Marshal seemed to change. He invited the members of the Expedition to an elaborate luncheon. Friendly relations were also established with some of the officials, as the Frenchmen showed their readiness to be of service. Dr. Delastre gave free consultations and even carried out an operation. Point lent personnel and equipment to repair the Government wireless station.

The 7th August brought good news.

“ . . . FPCG from FBQR . . . Chinese Government authorises your Group to continue journey to Kashgar to join Haardt's Group and return together to Peking.

¹ Monsieur Wilden was the new French Minister to China.

Official instructions have already been sent to Sinkiang by Nanking. Delighted at happy solution of this incident. Wilden."

So the affair was settled. The pity was that the local Chinese authorities could not be informed of this fact at once! But it was out of the question to admit the clandestine reception of the wireless message,¹ so nothing could be done before an official notification was received from the Marshal. On the third day Mr. Chen again appeared: "His Excellency requests you to hasten your preparations for departure."—At last!—"According to the decision of the Central Government which was duly communicated to you," continued Mr. Chen, "you must leave the country within the shortest time possible. His Excellency will send a guard to escort you to the Russian frontier at Chuguchak."

What did it mean? Was it possible that the latest instructions from the Central Government had not yet reached Urumchi? On the next day Point learned from Mr. Kierkegaard that they had been received by the Marshal, but that he could not admit it so long as the Chinese scientists were in the Province, because if he authorised the Europeans to go on to Kashgar he could not prevent the others from going there also. He was only awaiting the Soviet visas to send the latter back to China. Two days passed. On the third day Dr. Tsu Ming-yi, his private secretary, General Yao, Colonel Tiao and Mr. Yung came to the camp to say good-bye. Their collaboration with the "Sino-French Scientific Mission" was at an end.

But the China Group was not yet able to leave. And the Marshal turned a deaf ear to all entreaties and refused to grant an interview. Kierkegaard's solution was to send

¹ Communication was maintained for several weeks in the same way, indeed the Chinese, whose only important holiday, New Year, lasts three days, wondered why the French National Festival was celebrated so long with music, flags, etc.

him another present, as he had complained that the 60-watt set was too feeble and did not work. It may have been broken by his Chinese operators, but what the Marshal obviously wanted was the big wireless-set and three cars.

"Tell him that his wireless and cars are actually at Suchow. Doesn't he realise that the road is cut by the rebels and that we can do nothing?" said Point.

"He knows that as well as you do. He also knows that not only will Mâ Chung-ying not let the equipment pass but he will do his best to get hold of it."¹

"Will you be good enough," replied Point, "to explain to the Marshal that Haardt is powerful, and that if he is allowed to enter Sinkiang he will replace by a fresh consignment sent out via Berlin and Moscow anything that may be held up in Kansu?"²

It was in vain. Marshal King continued his tactics. Every day Chen appeared and insisted that the camp be moved to a new place, which was a mosquito-infested swamp. When Point refused, Chen increased the guard. And then one morning he demanded all the essential parts of the 500-watt plant—"I know that you communicate secretly."

A big wireless valve, two condensers, an ammeter and a resistance coil were handed over. Kervizic continued, nevertheless, to send and receive messages, for only spare parts had been given up. The next day Chen sealed the back door of the wireless car. He did not know of the sliding panel!

In spite of the reassuring news received from time to

¹ These fears were justified. Three months later General Mâ Chung-ying commandeered this wireless at Ansi (west of Suchow), and later installed it at Siningfu, where it is said to work to everyone's satisfaction.

² André Citroën had foreseen some such difficulty, and was alive to the fact that in Central Asia a good present is worth any number of passports. On the 7th August he wired to Point that he had ordered three new cars and two wireless-sets to be sent from Paris to Chuguchak via Berlin.

time—that Nanking had repeated its orders, that the Chinese Legation in France had intervened, and that Moscow had instructed its representative at Urumchi to help the Expedition—spirits began to flag. Lack of freedom, uncertainty and enforced idleness told on all. In addition to all these troubles, Kégresse had a fresh relapse. Even Father Teilhard became impatient, for he was wasting his time. As a matter of fact this distinguished geologist, ex-President of the French Geological Council and a man of world-wide reputation in scientific circles, had interrupted important research work in Peking in order to accompany the Expedition.¹

But he had not come all the way to Central Asia to spend his time changing gramophone records, the rôle assigned to him and Reymond, the naturalist, in the nightly concert party !

But grave as were the troubles of the Expedition, Marshal King had even more serious anxieties. The rebellion round Hami had assumed such proportions that the very existence of Chinese supremacy in Sinkiang was in jeopardy. The news from the zone of operations was one long tale of disaster. The twenty-year-old general Mâ Chung-ying—"the Hooligan" as the Chinese called him—had surrounded Hami, had taken by assault the fortress of Barkul—where there was an important supply of ammunition—and then fallen upon the main Chinese forces at Chi-ku-ching-tsze. Having led his troops over little known and barely accessible passes of the Barkul Shan and Bogdo Ola, he had surrounded General Liu's camp at night and slaughtered 8,000 men, and the Chinese General, seeing his army annihilated, had committed suicide. It was the stubborn resistance of Hami alone that prevented the rebels from marching victoriously on Urumchi.

¹ A member of the Geological Survey of China, Father Teilhard de Chardin, had, in collaboration with Dr. Black of the Rockefeller Foundation, contributed to the discovery of the *Homo Sinanthropus* (Prehistoric Peking Man).

The Marshal now needed time to collect fresh forces to meet the enemy, and troops were assembling from all parts of the Province. There were Chinese, Manchus, Andijans, Quzaks, Kirghiz and White Russians.¹ They were arriving from Chuguchak, Karachah, Kashgar and even from Yarkand, but, as the distances were enormous, they came in slowly. It was only by the 15th August that these different elements began to concentrate in the zone of military operations. For the success of the campaign it was imperative to establish communication between them and the capital. That proved to be difficult. The single telegraph line, repaired each morning, was cut each night by invisible hands, and the wireless, Point's present, by now installed at army headquarters, was not in working order.

On the 20th August, the Marshal summoned Point to his *yamen*.

"Though your passports have been cancelled by Nanking, I shall authorise your Chief, Mr. Haardt, to enter Sinkiang—but on one condition only—that you send your wireless expert to army headquarters to establish communication between the army and the capital."

"If necessary I will go there myself," answered Point in exactly the same voice, "but only on condition that four cars be allowed to go to Kashgar to meet Mr. Haardt, and that you will permit me to cross the lines so that I may try to reach Hami to rescue my assistant Mr. Petro."²

After a week Point's conditions were accepted in principle. But it took another week to settle the details.

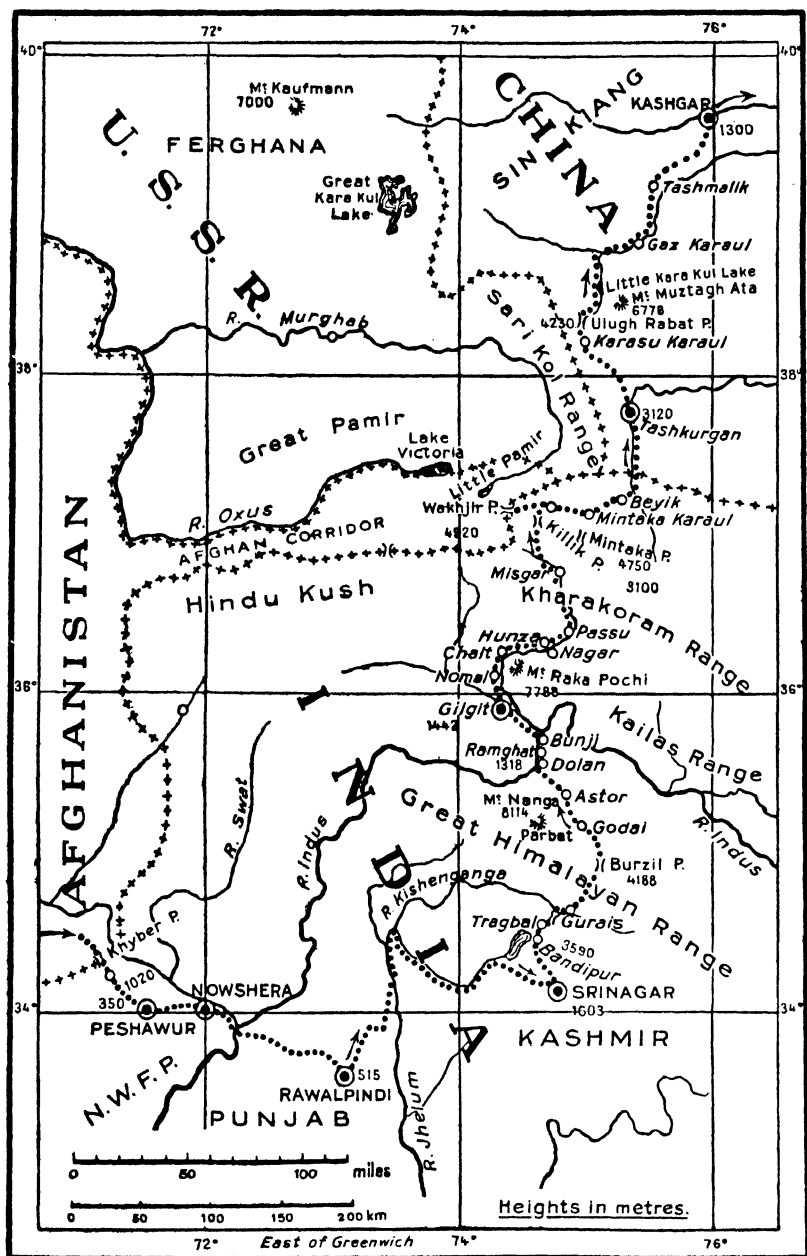
By now forty-three days had passed since that memorable evening when the first call for help was launched into the air ; forty-three days of bargaining, of parleying,

¹ Who by force of circumstance had become Chinese citizens.

² From Petro, cut off in the besieged city of Hami, no communication had been received for seven weeks.

of diplomatic representations, of secret communications ; forty-three days during which the French Legation in China, the Chinese Legation in France, the French Government, the Nanking Government and the Soviet Government had intervened to overcome the caprice of a Chinese provincial governor.

On the 6th September Point, accompanied by Chauvet, Kervizic and Li, started eastwards towards the rebel zone, and four cars set out for the west to meet Haardt, who had already entered Sinkiang. On the same day the members of the Expedition who remained at Urumchi yielded to the insistent demands of Mr. Chen and moved into a house in the suburbs, thus finally abandoning the little grove which had with good reason been christened " The Camp of Staunch Resistance."



Route of the Expedition across the Himalayas

CHAPTER X

IN THE HIMALAYAS

The Pamir Group again—A last glimpse of Kashmir—S.O.S. from Point—The battle with the mountains—Hunza and Nagar.

TO RETURN TO THE PAMIR GROUP, which on the 12th July was at Bandipur with its two cars, preparing to continue its journey northwards across the Himalayas: the road by which it had come from Srinagar continued as such only up to the Sonarwain Bridge, some three miles beyond Bandipur, and up to this point passed between paddy fields in which small gangs of cultivators sang as they delved, bodies bent and legs deep in mud. They seemed happy in spite of the hard work and the heat and the fact that ten pounds' weight of paddy brought them in but a rupee. No doubt they preferred their poverty and freedom to the serfdom of their fathers, who in days gone by used to be conscripted as carriers on the Gilgit road, and who not infrequently died from hardship and exposure. Perhaps that may have been in their minds as they watched the unusually long string of porters and animals now heading northward. These porters were Guraisis—hardy hill-men of mixed blood, descendants of Dards and Kashmiris. As they would not go beyond the limits of their own country, their places would then be taken, first by Astoris, then by Baltis, Ladakis and finally by the stout highlanders of Hunza.

Once across the bridge, Haardt turned to look back at
No

that last stretch of cart-road shaded by chenar (plane) trees. His pony's hoofs had already struck the stony track which disappeared ahead among the wild grape-vines, and showed up again—the merest scratch—on the giant hillside some thousand feet higher up. The invigorating air was redolent of pine and deodar. Here the mountains were not unlike the Alps but were more majestic and on a grander scale. As one looked back, the panorama behind broadened out at each step, until it comprised the whole vale of Kashmir, with its rivers and lakes, and the bluish fringe of the outer Himalayan ranges which separated it from the scorching plains of India. A second glance, and the glorious vista of the valley had vanished from sight, already hidden by high mountain spurs. A whole stratum of humanity had been left behind. To the north, wandering clouds wreathed the giant deodars, but when the mist lifted it disclosed a chaotic tumble of range upon range of mountains separated by blue valleys and dominated by still higher ridges beyond.

It was across this country, along a narrow rocky path damaged by recent storms that Haardt planned to take his two cars as far as was humanly possible. But in execution the difficulty of co-ordinating the pace of machines and animals at once became apparent. With the vehicles it was necessary to take infinite precautions and to perform various manœuvres, which greatly militated against any regular rate of marching. Even during the second stage, before Koragbal was reached, the mechanics had had to carry out a series of complicated operations, here jacking up the cars and there hauling them by hand round the dangerous hair-pin bends which coiled like a snake up the steep mountain side. This slowed down progress quite enough ; but on the following day, before reaching the beautiful village of Gurais, the time-table was completely upset by the arrival at a light wooden bridge which



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A STIFF CLIMB IN THE HIMALAYAS

spanned the Kishanganga torrent, roaring far below. Would it carry a two-ton car was the question on everyone's lips. The Hindu engineer who had built it was attached to the Expedition by the Maharajah of Kashmir, and should have been able to answer, but his opinion seemed more doubtful than the capacity of the bridge itself. After two hours of calculation he was still sucking his pencil thoughtfully.

But the party could not wait indefinitely ; and it was decided to try hauling the empty cars without load or driver across the bridge by cable, the steering being done from behind by a long pair of reins. When the first car was half-way across, it yawed to one side, and was brought up by the wheel guide at the edge of the roadway. The whole frail construction creaked. "Arrêtez ! Stop ! Halt ! . . . Send a man to the wheel !" But it was only when this was yelled out in Hindustani that the men on shore stopped pulling, which enabled Ferracci to dash out to the car and straighten her up. This was the first of many similar crossings which had to be negotiated before the Kilik Pass was reached.

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Despite the height of the peaks, the country was far from bare. Its nature was that of a thickly wooded natural park, and it was a favourite shooting district of the British officials. Along the way, up to the snow-clad Raj Diangan Pass (11,777 feet) cattle and buffaloes, herded by youthful duffle-clad shepherds, were grazing on the grassy slopes. And here and there a thread of acrid blue smoke rose from a hut and was lost in the sky. Beyond the pass the track dived down into another valley, where long glaciers of the previous year's snow still lingered among the giant pines, some uprooted by recent avalanches. From hour to hour the climate changed.

Not far from Gurais, in a green valley covered with artemisia, were a few rustic huts. It was an ideal place for a holiday and was occupied by a young British couple who were camping there, the husband fishing and his wife sketching. Beyond this valley the mountains closed in again, and the convoy wound its way through a barren rocky gulch, which at the end of two stages led into another "happy valley" carpeted with a variety of wild flowers—hawthorn, roses, poppies, bluebells and sweet-peas—a final glimpse of the beauty of Kashmir.

Five days after leaving Bandipur only sixty-five miles had been covered, most of the delay being caused by seven bridges, at each of which there was a repetition of the same performance of unloading, making anchorages, and hauling the cars across by manual power. This complicated procedure entailed much hanging about, which was extremely tiring for man and beast. But the difficulties met with so far had been comparatively insignificant, as was realised when the Expedition came to the foot of the Burzil Pass, which crosses the western end of the main Himalaya Range at an altitude of 13,775 feet. There, quite abruptly, bare rocks took the place of meadows, and ice that of flowers. When the sun was up and the hard crust melted, the ponies sank up to their girths in the snow, which, though it was the end of July, lay sixteen to twenty feet deep alongside the vaguely outlined track. This involved much pick and shovel work; but it was hoped, nevertheless, to reach the top of the pass in twelve hours. Slowly, in first gear reduced, the cars began to climb, but, as it was necessary to sound the snow at almost every foot—in order to detect possible ice caverns below the surface—their pace was less than a mile an hour. The rarefied air which made breathing difficult also affected the carburation, and the engines lost 53 per cent of their power. The fierce sun, which soon dissipated the freezing morning



Ph. Morisset, copyright E.C.C.A.

HACKING A WAY ACROSS THE BURZIL PASS

mist, caused headaches and retarded progress by softening the snow.

Higher up the pass the cars often listed dangerously on the 45° slopes, and great care had to be taken to prevent them from slipping sideways down the *khud* and burying themselves in snowdrifts below. On several occasions a car did begin to skid towards the abyss, but each time the lugs of the track-bands fortunately got a purchase on firm ground, and the machine went on. Thus the day passed slowly.

Never before had the eternal snows re-echoed to the roar of engines. Was the fact that they now did so a sign of victory, or was it a challenge to the majestic silence of the peaks that reared their heads heavenwards above the clouds? In any event the momentary fine weather was only a truce in the perpetual warfare of Nature, many victims of which could be seen—skeletons of mules and horses buried under the snow months earlier and only recently uncovered by the sun. Near the top of the pass we came upon a hut on piles, which was a refuge for the post-runners who cross with the mails winter and summer alike. The height of the piles showed how deep the snow could be.

By 6 p.m. the highest point had been reached, and the mechanics, completely exhausted after twelve hours' effort, thought only of sleeping where they were. But the natives would not hear of this, for even in July blizzards often sweep over the pass, freezing to death in a few minutes men and animals careless enough to stay there overnight.

Beyond the Burzil the country was dry and arid. The path dived down 3,000 feet and passed through gorges in which a few hamlets sheltered depressed and goitred hill-folk. Two miles before reaching Godai, on a narrow ledge overhanging the Astor River, Cecillon, who was driving the "Golden Scarab," suddenly felt a void under his near track.

“ Ferracci, I’m sinking ! ”

“ Don’t move ! ”

In this case obedience required some nerve ; but Cecillon luckily was not aware of what filled Ferracci with terror—namely that the retaining wall had collapsed and that a whole section of the road had slid down the precipice, leaving a yawning gap. It was a miracle that the two-ton car remained suspended. Ferracci crawled to the edge to see what could be done. As he looked over, his pipe slipped from his pocket and went hurtling down into the torrent hundreds of feet below. After five hours of improvised engineering, the “ Golden Scarab ” was hauled by its companion back on to solid ground, a pipe being the only casualty. But it might easily have been a car and its driver and Cecillon had not got over the shock of this occurrence when, two days later, on the 21st July, the party entered Astor, to be greeted with drums, pipes, and the shouts of the populace.

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By the 25th Audouin-Dubreuil’s party, which was eight stages behind Haardt’s, reached Peshwari. With it was the wireless set, but so far, in spite of repeated attempts to establish connection, no news had been received from the China Group. That night, when darkness had not only hidden the outline of the mountains, but had thereby released the party from their oppressive influence and even allowed its members to forget that they were 9,000 feet up in the heart of the Himalayas, Audouin-Dubreuil sat in the little rest-house busily checking the coolie pay-roll by the light of a hurricane lantern. Suddenly the door opened. The papers flew into the air, and from outside came the thundering roar of the waters pent up in the gorge and the voices of the coolies gathered round a camp-fire. Laplanche dashed into the hut.



Ph. Morizel, copyright E.C.C.-A.

ON THE SLOPES

"News—news from Point. Just come in."

"Good news? Let's have it!"

"Not very, read this."

Eagerly the men leaned over the scrap of paper, on which were scribbled four lines in pencil, several words being missing: "FBQR from FPCG Legafrance, Peking..."

"He was calling the French Legation in Peking," explained Laplanche. "I have not the serial number of the message because the atmospherics . . ."

"Never mind the atmospherics. Let's have the message."

"FBQR from FPCG. Legafrance, Peking . . . are held at Ur . . . please intercede . . . permission to send . . . cars to Kashgar to . . . Haardt's Group stop Governor . . . requisition cars stop Was personally held prisoner . . . days Victor Point stop FPCG asks FBQR to pass all its traffic in the air stop We are being spied upon."

A glance at the map. Ur . . . could only be Urumchi. But that was north of the Tian Shan Mountains and off Point's route! Why was he there? He certainly had not gone of his own accord. As the passports were in order, how could the Governor commandeer the cars? Held prisoner? But he must have been released or he could not have used the wireless. . . . What did FBQR mean?

"It's the call sign of the *Regulus*," explained Laplanche, "our despatch-boat at Hongkong."

But the question was how to get this news to Haardt, who must already have passed Astor and could not now be caught by telegram until he arrived at Gilgit. The only thing to be done was, on reaching the next telegraph station, Minmarg, to wire in both directions—to Gilgit, to await Haardt, and to Goerger at Srinagar.

Haardt had been warned by every officer who knew this country that it would be useless to attempt to take the cars

beyond Astor, that fantastic little hamlet perched up high on a pinnacle of deeply furrowed glacial mud, crowning the junction of two gigantic gorges. It seemed a miracle, or perhaps a caprice of Allah, that the whole village did not slide down into the abyss. This, in fact, was only prevented by the score or so of poplars which anchored it to the soil. Yet a hundred or more people lived there in crudely-built stone huts, stubbornly cultivating a few terraced patches of earth. Dressed in tattered felt and wearing dirty woollen turbans, these mountaineers looked at the foreigners with dull, indifferent eyes, like prisoners who have been for a long time deprived of sun and air. When Fate decreed that they should be born in this place, she decreed that they should live like pygmies in a Cyclopean country, seeing nothing but bottomless pits or lofty peaks ; hearing nothing but the everlasting roar of torrents or the heavy groans of landslides ; and spending their lives in a ceaseless battle with the vast processes of Nature.

These simple folk regarded the cars as a challenge to the spirit of the mountains and said they could not be taken farther. Haardt, therefore, rode on ahead with Ferracci to reconnoitre the barren twenty-five miles from Astor to Dashkin. He found the valley strangled by still higher mountains so close together as to leave only a streak of blue sky overhead. At " Mile 7 " a hundred yards of pathway had completely disappeared. Undermined by recent downpours, the mountain-side had slid down bodily into the ravine, leaving a glissade of loose rubble pitched at a surprisingly steep slope, where a touch of the foot would send a stone a good thousand feet before it stopped rolling.

Haardt was still optimistic. But as he watched the native drivers unloading their animals and carrying the packs across the fan-shaped slopes of shale, he came to the conclusion that the car-loads would have to be lightened.

The party itself left Astor on the next day and followed the path which now wound in and out and climbed and descended steep hog's-backs, on which the two machines dipped and tossed like boats on a heavy sea. From the top of these ascents it was impossible to see the zig-zags of the road ahead, for it had been almost entirely wiped out ; and here the cars had to be let down by means of cables to the bottom of the gorge, where the ground was at least flat. But on the sides of valleys which were of recent formation, erosion was still going on ; and wherever the slopes were subject to landslides the ground at their base was obstructed by debris. The rocks had to be levered to one side, or broken up with heavy hammers, and the coolies taught how to swing them without damaging themselves, and to find the line of cleavage of the stone. It was slow work, and it took a whole day to cover four miles.

At daybreak next morning, alone in this chaos of boulders and deafened by the thunderous roar of the Astor River, which swirled past their feet, it seemed to Haardt, Ferracci and the four mechanics that they would never be able to climb out of this bottomless pit—where their struggles were like those of beetles. But when the narrow strip of sky overhead grew lighter Pecqueur turned up with a fresh gang of coolies, and someone reported that half a mile of good going lay ahead ; hope revived. After this short relief there was again a bad stretch ; and the entire morning was devoted to feats of balance on a narrow, crumbling ledge which had to be shored up and widened with planks and earth. Foot by foot the path was consolidated under each car-track until “ Mile 7 ” was reached. Here the landslide necessitated dismantling both cars—though they were already reduced to skeletons. On the 25th a start was made to divide them into 60-lb. loads ; and by the afternoon the ground was covered with gear-boxes, differentials, wheels, brake-drums, track-bands and pulleys, arranged in rows as

in a factory, with Ferracci and his gang awaiting under a dazzling sky a further reinforcement of coolies from Astor.

But when these poor wretches arrived they were already tired out and hungry. They squatted on the ground in small groups, most of them flatly refusing to do any work. It took all Colonel Gabriel's persuasiveness and linguistic powers—as well as a goodly share of the available stock of rice—to induce them to carry on, instead of deserting to their homes. Next morning, attracted by reports of the free issue of rations, an additional gang put in an appearance and set to work. Though the distance to be crossed was only some two or three hundred yards, it was difficult for them to find a firm footing as they sidled over the shaky ground, halting every few steps. But the line of panting and struggling men did not stop, and the piles of stuff on the far side gradually grew in size. By the 27th the two cars were re-assembled, and next day they advanced five miles towards Dashkin. The usual order of march was for the mounted men to lead. They were followed by the pack-horses, then the coolies and lastly the cars, for which they had sometimes to wait one or two days. Each day, meanwhile, the stock of forage was decreasing; and in this barren country a good silver rupee could buy nothing. As the pitiless sun rose high above the mountains, the area of shade dwindled, and the bare rocks became as hot as clinkers in an ash-pit.

Morizet was one of the first to be attacked by dysentery, but he refused to allow it to interfere with his work. Trudging along on foot, followed by a coolie carrying his camera, he took photographs from every side and angle, determined to place on record for future travellers a picture of this hellish country.

Finally Dashkin was reached, and then, on the 29th, Doian. It appeared that beyond that village recent storms had caused further extensive destruction, and that the fall



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A CLOSE SHAVE. ABOVE THE ASTOR RIVER

of a cliff had actually changed the course of the Astor River. Haardt, therefore, again rode ahead to reconnoitre. He had intended Ferracci to join him later, also on horse-back. But through a misunderstanding, the latter followed up on the 30th with both cars, and after a very difficult journey in torrid heat and amidst clouds of sandflies—during which it was a hand-to-hand tussle between Nature and machines—met Haardt leading his horse on his way back to Doian. The latter was much touched by this devotion to his supposed wishes.

On the 2nd August the cars were rolling along the broad valley of the Indus under conditions which, after the recent days of hard struggle, seemed almost too good to be true. Although all realised that their penetration into these regions could have no practical value, a sporting spirit had impelled the continuance of the effort. And now the two sorely-tried machines, after crawling among rocks of every shape and size, clinging precariously to narrow ledges, tearing off the limber-hooks of their trailers on sharp turns, being hoisted and lowered by winch and cable, but with their engines still functioning after twelve hundred hours of continuous work, had become symbolic. Moreover, their astonishing tenacity and endurance grew into a legend with all the people round ; which was why the poor Astoris, hands bleeding from the perpetual hauling on steel cables, cheered when they emerged from the labyrinthine chaos north of Ramghat.

For days and nights Haardt, Ferracci, Cecillon, Corset, Normand and Le Roux had snatched no more than a few hours' sleep, lying down where they found themselves, in some hollow between the rocks. But at dawn on the 2nd August they had their reward, as in the cold light of the moon their machines went spinning along at the bottom of a broad valley, at the ends of which stood two glacial spectres so high that they seemed unreal, though dominating

everything by their immensity. Straight ahead was Rakaposhi (the Devil's Tail), 25,550 feet high, and behind, Nanga Parbat (the Naked Goddess), 26,620 feet high, whose snow-clad pinnacles suddenly burst into rosy flame when touched by the first rays of the rising sun.

Two days later the convoy entered Gilgit, where the whole population awaited its arrival. None of the natives had ever seen a wheeled vehicle, let alone a track-motor-car, and the roads were lined with crowds. Some of the people ran along in the dust, others stood still, hiding their faces behind their hands, and laughing. Children climbed on the bonnets and took it in turns to have a few minutes, joy-ride. Many of the astonished and puzzled onlookers stooped down to watch the wheels go round and the movement of the tracks. Wrinkled old men shook their heads. One fell on his knees, expressing the hope that in the future these iron horses would cross the mountains between Gilgit and Srinagar regularly, so that he could see the great plains before his death !

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Haardt pored over Audouin-Dubreuil's message. The hold-up of the China Group at Urumchi made the proposed meeting of the two separate motor columns impossible, and it would therefore be only a waste of energy to attempt to take his two machines through the Hunza gorges and the knotted chain of the Karakoram. Such a *tour de force*, moreover, would upset the itinerary and take time, and the China Group was in need of immediate assistance. It was imperative to press forward as quickly as possible, which entailed going on without the cars.¹ Mr. Todd, the British Resident at Gilgit, who, like all the other officials in India, had received the French with

¹ Of the two cars which had come so far, "The Silver Crescent" was presented to the Government of India and left at Gilgit in commemoration of the first motor-car journey to those parts. The other—"The Golden Scarab"—was dismantled and taken back to Paris, where it can now be seen at the Citroën Museum.

traditional British hospitality, which the members of the Pamir Group will never forget, promised to give Haardt every assistance in the arrangements for carrying on to the Chinese border.

Extract from Ferracci's log-book.

" August 7. For us the Expedition ends here. Our Chief left this evening. It was hard for us to say good-bye. He, too, found it difficult. He mounted his horse, and the five of us watched him ride away. He turned and waved : then was hidden by a rock. When shall we see him again ? "

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A few miles beyond Gilgit, a ravine pierces the massive wall of the Karakoram range. It is the valley of the Kanjut or Hunza River which has its source far north, near the passes that lead from India into Chinese Turkestan. This inaccessible and inhospitable region, tucked away in the folds of some of the highest mountain chains, belongs to the two semi-independent Hill States of Hunza and Nagar, whose lawless inhabitants used, up to the end of last century, to terrorise the neighbouring countryside by their practice of highway robbery.

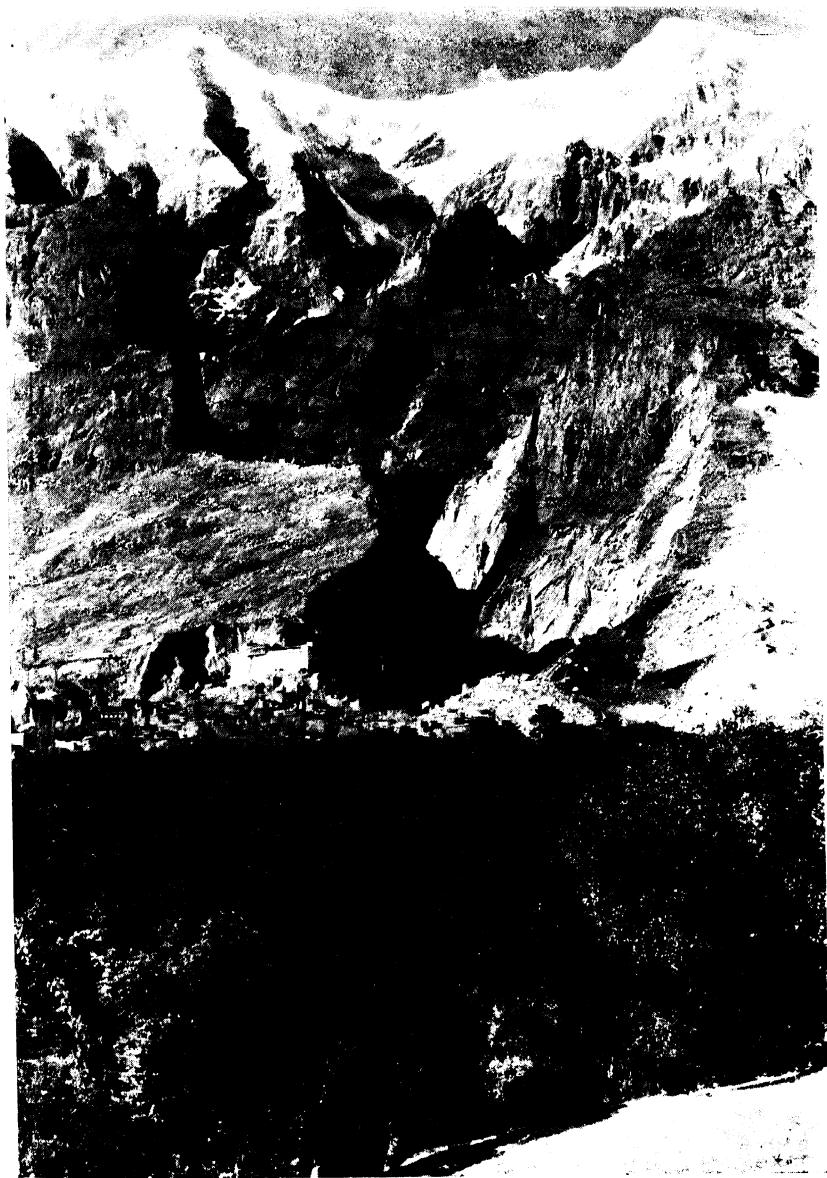
The entrance to this stronghold, which is at the confluence of the Gilgit and the Hunza Rivers, is its only vulnerable point, and even here the gorge is so narrow that the sun never penetrates it. But in August the bare reddish rocks stored up and gave out all the summer heat, and in its shade one suffered more than in the sunshine of Gilgit. The ponies, with heads drooping, frequently stopping as if for want of air, stumbled along wearily on the muddy soil deposited by deliquescent glaciers. Then the riders had to dismount and lead the animals until they, in turn, were ready to drop, suffocated by the torrid breath of this geological detritus.

Twenty-five miles farther north, and deeper in the mountains, lies Nagar, approached by a narrow ledge along the face of a towering granite cliff, its gaps spanned by beams or filled in with rubble. At the frontier is a locked gate, which can be opened by drawing a bolt. But the protection afforded by this barrier is purely ironic. That it is not this gate which bars entrance into Nagar is realised on following the path running east for thirty miles up to the two villages of Hunza and Nagar on the right and left banks of the Hunza River.

Standing on the same plateau but separated by the deep canyon of the River, the two capitals of these little kingdoms glare defiantly at each other. Although the people of both States are Muhammadans, they belong to different sects and a centuries-old hatred has existed between them. The Nagars, being Shiah, do not drink wine, and regard as infidels the men of Hunza, who belong to the Ismaili sect under the spiritual leadership of His Highness, the Aga Khan. The two tribal Chiefs, or Mirs, were hereditary enemies, but their hostility gave way to a friendly alliance whenever their independence was menaced from outside. This state of affairs lasted until the year 1891, when the British under Colonel Durand finally pacified the region. Now the route through both States is practically under the control of the Kashmir Government, and both Mirs receive pensions. In token of their fealty to the Maharajah of that State, the Mir of Hunza has to send a yearly nominal tribute of twenty ounces of gold,¹ two horses and two dogs, while the Mir of Nagar pays only ten ounces of gold and two baskets of apricots.

In August, 1931, both impatiently awaited the passage of Haardt's Expedition, though, since times had changed, they could no longer rob his caravan. The Mir of Hunza

¹ There are auriferous alluvial deposits in the Hunza River, and the natives work the mines in a primitive way.



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BALITT--THE CAPITAL OF HUNZA

was particularly anxious to welcome a party of visitors which would give work to many porters and ponies. And its appearance was a veritable gift from heaven both to the Chief and to the poor peasantry of his little principality.

The villages of Maiun, Hini and Aliabad were successively passed on the way between the capital of Hunza and the frontier. Here the solidity of the houses built of stone and mortar was somewhat surprising, as was the abundance of fruit. The apricot harvest was in full swing ; and seen from the path immediately above, the flat roofs of the houses covered with the ripe fruit drying in the sun looked like bowls filled with golden sovereigns.

“ Ah ! It is nineteen years now since I last visited my British friends at Srinagar.”

The Mir of Hunza, who was entertaining the visitors, chuckled hoarsely. He wore the national head-dress—a white woollen cap with closely rolled edges, and a pink necktie tight round the neck. Next to him, in European clothes, with a ruddy complexion and fair moustache, which gave him the appearance of a gentleman-farmer, sat his son, the heir-apparent. The latter was not surprised at being told that he looked like a European, for, as he proudly informed us, his people were descended from the members of the expedition of Alexander the Great. To the sound of mandolins, tom-toms and instruments resembling clarionets, the young dancing-boys of the Mir pirouetted round, gracefully lifting their arms and playing with their braids of false hair—which had formerly graced the heads of Kashgar beauties. Then four men danced, bounding furiously, clapping their hands and bursting into old war-songs in praise of the heroic age.

From the terrace of the castle of Baltit, perched like an eagle's nest on top of a sheer cliff, lay outspread below

a panorama of silent and mysterious beauty. Details of Nature's giant glacial architecture and of the practically vertical mountain walls could be clearly seen through field-glasses ; and this wild, inhuman land, rough-hewn and shaped by wind, frost, ice and gravity, was almost overpowering.

" A little more whisky ? " The reception was nearing its end. Haardt offered his host some handsome presents, which the latter graciously accepted, at the same time asking—for he was a man who thought of everything—that any money which the Expedition might be intending to offer to his retainers should be handed to him. " As for those "—introducing with a vague gesture a group of dignitaries, who bowed low—" they are the most important functionaries of my State, and I authorise them to receive presents directly from your generous hands."

Beyond Baltit the already constricted valley of Hunza narrowed down to a mere slit between wall-like cliffs, which barely left space for the turbid stream below. It was difficult to believe that any kind of road could have been built on these sheer walls, but there it clung, sometimes with a single telegraph wire along it. The countryside was still in a state of unstable equilibrium—unfinished and chaotic—and one feared that at any moment the track might be carried away by a fresh landslide. In front, behind, or above, something was always breaking loose, and certain stretches had to be crossed in a hurry, under a continuous shower of shale and rock. Pack-horses had by now been replaced by carriers.

The last patches of barley and corn receded from sight as the pathway climbed ever higher into a grim and bleak region. At Atabad, a small village seven miles beyond Baltit, the desolation was relieved by a few anæmic poplars.



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BEYOND BALTIMORE TRANSPORT COULD BE CARRIED OUT ONLY BY MEN

Farther on, cut off from the world and even from each other, by giant escarpments and mighty mud-slides, lay Gulmit, Pasu, Khaibar, and Gircha, the last hamlets of Hunza, clinging tenaciously to a few acres of arable land.

The procession of 150 men toiled stolidly on. The Hunza coolies, some of them walking bare-footed over the sharp rocks, but carrying their 60-lb. loads without faltering, snaked along the narrow track scarcely a foot wide. On the 16th August the caravan crossed the last bridge—over a deep gorge. It consisted of three swaying cables of twisted brushwood, one forming the roadway and the other two the hand-rails. Men passed over it in trepidation.

Finally, on the 17th August, the party reached Misgar, a small village lost in the centre of the labyrinth of mountains in which the Karakoram interlocks with the buttresses of the Hindu Kush. Here the telegraph wire ended. And here, on the threshold of a new world at a height of over 10,000 feet, lived a handful of sturdy mountaineers—a remnant of the old Aryan invaders.

CHAPTER XI

THE ROOF OF THE WORLD

The Great Divide—The Kirghiz—The first Chinese—The high valleys of the Pamirs—The plain at last.

THE TINY VILLAGE of Misgar, smothered between two giants, the Karakoram and the Hindu Kush, is only two days' march from the Sinkiang boundary. Officially we had the right of entry into Sinkiang, but we were warned privately that across the border the people had been forbidden by the Chinese authorities to have any dealings with foreigners, so that we could count neither on help nor supplies.

Hackin, Iacovleff, and Sivel, who were the first to reach Misgar, had had to mark time there for two whole weeks whilst waiting for the rest. And when the second party under Haardt arrived on the 17th August, it, also, had to resign itself to waiting. Fortunately the telegraph enabled us to keep in touch with the outside world, and through Goerger, who was still at Srinagar, we were able to communicate with all those interested in the success of the undertaking : M. Citroën in Paris ; the French Minister in Peking ; Point in Urumchi ; Dr. La Gorce in Washington ; and the British Consul-General in Kashgar.

The situation on the 20th August—as far as we knew it—was as follows :

The passports cancelled over a month before by Nan-king (for reasons unknown) had again been made valid.

Nanking had given formal instructions to the Governor-General of Sinkiang to authorise Haardt to enter Chinese territory, and to allow Point to proceed to Kashgar.

The Governor-General had so far paid no attention to these instructions.

The failure of the China Group to deliver to him the promised equipment seemed to be the reason for this attitude.

This equipment (three cars and three wireless-sets), sent from Tientsin on the 3rd April, had fallen into the hands of the Muhammadan rebels at the Sinkiang frontier, and M. Citroën had shipped duplicate equipment to Urumchi via Moscow.

The caravan of sixty camels and sixty ponies, in charge of a man called Mullabai, which had been sent from Kashgar to meet Haardt, had been stopped somewhere *en route*.

A Muhammadan rebellion had spread over the eastern part of Sinkiang, and the city of Hami, where Petro had been detained for two months, was still besieged.

Point was hoping for a prompt settlement of these difficulties.

Meanwhile autumn was approaching and if permission to go on had not been received by the 8th September, we should be obliged to turn back, for, so late in the season, a fall of snow on the Burzil Pass was likely to make the return journey impossible. By the 28th August, when the third party had come up, another crisis had arisen, for, with the prolonged concentration at one spot of two hundred porters, supplies began to run low. At midnight, however, the situation was relieved by the arrival of the mail-runner with an urgent message from the British Resident at Gilgit, who had heard from the British Consul-General at Kashgar that Mullabai had at last been

authorised to take his caravan beyond the Chinese post of Tashkurghan to meet the Expedition at Beyik. Who had found the key to the door we did not know. But it had suddenly opened, and the road to China was free.

Breathless, man and beast toiled slowly on in Indian file. By the time we had reached the last slopes before the Kilik Pass, the character of the country had changed. Gentle valleys and rounded domelike hills had taken the place of the deep gorges and rocky chaos of Hunza and of the sharp peaks of the Karakoram. The mountain torrents, also, had decreased in size. Above, high up in the crystal air, floated a few wisps of cloud, as if traced by a giant brush against the pale blue of heaven. From the eternal snows of the Pass the crests of the surrounding mountains seemed to have shrunk in height and to reveal nothing but sky beyond. It was the Roof of the World.

Nine miles to the west of the Kilik Pass is another more elevated gateway in the Great Divide—the Wakhjir Pass (16,150 feet) leading from Afghanistan. As it had been a point of importance in our original plans, we made a detour to see it. Below the Pass, at an altitude of almost 16,000 feet, surrounded by peaks from 18,000 to 20,000 feet high, we found a small lake. Upon its surface, sparkling in the sun with all the colours of the rainbow, floated a sheet of ice. It was extraordinary to see free water at such an altitude. We could not find this lake on any map and imagined that it must normally be buried under deep snow, and that perhaps we were the first to admire its ethereal beauty. A half-effaced inscription on a rock, marked the frontiers of Afghanistan, Russia, and China. A desolate and impressive spot ! Silence and solitude, broken only by the shrill cries of marmots, brooded over the vast sloping sheets of virgin snow.



Ph. Moriart, copyright E.C.C.-4

OVER THE KILIK PASS—IN INDIAN FILE

At our feet ran the watershed between the Tarim and Oxus Rivers—the Great Divide. From the moraine of a thick glacier we could see the water bubble up and separate into two distinct streamlets—one of which eventually flowed down to the Aral Sea and the other to the Lop Nor. But the Great Divide is not only a watershed; it is also a line of cleavage between sections of the human race, separating the Aryans from the ancient Turks and Mongols, the settlers from the nomads.

Central Asia begins at Kosh Bel, at the foot of the two passes, where the Kashmir and the Afghan tracks join and form one road to China. And there, in a large peaceful green valley, we found a small camp of three felt tents. Around and about were grazing herds, and awaiting our arrival was a group of expectant people, whose curiosity exceeded our own.

These people, with their slit-eyes and high cheek-bones, were the Kirghiz, and the felt tents in which they lived were called *yurts*. The men wore caps, boots and clothes made of sheepskin. Some of the women had snow-white calico turbans wound high on their heads. Others, more coquettish, wore under the turbans kerchiefs decorated with mother-of-pearl buttons and little bells, the whole head-dress being surmounted by an embroidered mat and ribbons. The gay effect was heightened by curious ornaments—jewellery of carved horn, and necklaces of braided yak-hair, with iron pendants. It was strange in these pastoral surroundings to find such a love of adornment. The women were not beautiful according to our standards, but they smiled pleasantly, and they were the first unveiled Muhammadan women we had seen since we left Beirut.

At Kosh Bel a fresh complication arose in the matter of transport, for, absurd as it might seem in so vast and desolate a country, the men of Hunza were not permitted to go farther on foreign soil and were obliged to return to

Misgar ; and all our baggage—so far carried by coolies—had to be transferred to yaks, which are the beasts of burden in these high altitudes. While Hackin, therefore, bargained with the Kirghiz for the hire of yaks, Morizet grew more and more nervous at the idea of entrusting a fifty-thousand-franc camera to a strange type of animal ; and his fears were not allayed when the pick of the herd was brought before him.

The yak is a strange ruminant, something like a grand piano, standing four-square on its short rigid legs. A kind of Jack-of-all-trades, it can carry a pack or pull a cart ; one can eat its flesh or drink its milk—out of its horns, each of which holds more than a pint ; its dung serves as fuel ; and its tail forms a good fly-whisk. The Kirghiz ride the yaks, using a cord through the nostrils as a rein ; and at Kosh Bel an animal well broken-in to the saddle is worth twenty-five rupees. The Expedition needed sixty of these beasts for the short trip to Beyik, where we hoped to meet Mulla-bai with the camels and pack-ponies from Kashgar.

It was a bright, cool September day, without a breath of wind, as we discussed our plans at Kosh Bel, sitting in the open, round a fire of juniper wood. When Hauss, the Afghan “ boy ” had laid the small tables, Amirah, the Hindu “ boy,” rang the camel-bell to announce luncheon. And no banqueting hall, however palatial, could have provided a more luxurious setting than we had for this meal, served at an altitude of 14,000 feet, in an immense grassy valley, at the cross-roads of four Empires. Jourdan had his back towards the south, where rose the formidable rampart of India—the Hindu Kush. Audouin-Dubreuil, resting his elbow on the table, faced north and saw before him a medley of white domes—the Russian Pamir. Someone else shielded his lighted match from a gentle westerly breeze which blew from Afghanistan. And we were sitting on Chinese soil !

Within this infinite frame men of many races had developed without being merged, the turban of the Hindu still remaining distinct from the fur cap of the Kirghiz or the *Tchalap* of the men of Hunza. As we sat and ate, the bustle of the coolies, the restless movement of the unsaddled horses and donkeys, the tethered snorting yaks, the many fires—each separate thread of blue smoke rising toward the same sky—harmonised in an enchanting symphony of sight and sound. Exhilarated by the mountain air of the heights, we felt that it was good to be alive.

Under a clear blue sky, feathered with cirrus clouds, we galloped over the broad, grassy, or gravel-strewn, valleys of the Taghdumbash Pamir. The country was but sparsely inhabited, and it was hard to believe that this species of no man's land was China, for so far we had not met a single Chinaman. This corridor seemed to belong to no one in particular, and each of us thrusting along at full gallop could imagine himself its conqueror.

When we passed Karatash, our guide—a frontier Beg mounted on a cobby Andijan pony, told us that the Soviet military post at Kizil Rabat was no more than a three-hour ride distant along the Chirka Darya. Of the fact that India was even closer we were reminded when a Wakhi wearing a cross-belt marked "Mail Runner" arrived at our bivouac at Mintaka Aghzi, having crossed the very difficult Mintaka Pass (15,430 feet) on foot in eight hours. He delivered to Haardt a message received at Misgar two days after our departure :

"Obtained permission to send four cars to meet you at Aksu on condition that I instal a wireless-post in the rebel zone where I shall go to-night with Kervizic. V. Point."

This message, despatched from Urumchi by wireless, had been received by Goerger at Srinagar, telegraphed to Gilgit, then telephoned to Misgar and thence forwarded to Haardt by special delivery. Things looked brighter, and we went to sleep happy, in spite of the snorting of the yaks and the cold which at this height (15,000 feet) was bitter, with the wind whistling through the Mintaka-Aghz, corridor, from China to India. Nevertheless, our anxiety for a change of transport continued, for the yaks had already playfully smashed to pieces ten cases of food.

It was with great relief, therefore, that we found Mulla-bai punctually at the rendezvous at Beyik on the 6th September. This man was a Siberian Buriat who had lived in Sinkiang for thirty years. Speaking broken Russian, which, fortunately, Iacovleff was able to understand, he said that he had almost given up hope of meeting us, for he had been told that the whole of "Mr. Director's" (Haardt's) party had perished under a landslide in the mountains. When he was asked for the source of his information, his face wrinkled and became as indecipherable as an old parchment. To the suggestion that the Chinese were responsible he made no reply, but hid a smile under the fur flap of his velvet cap.

Standing close by us during this conversation was an insignificant little person clad in a cotton-padded robe and cloth shoes, a red visiting-card, inscribed with large black characters, in his hand. He now took off his cap and prostrated himself several times.

"He humbly offers you his best," said Mullabai, interpreting, as cups of tea and a large plate of roast mutton were brought up and laid on a scarf spread on the ground. "He apologises for the miserable welcome, which is not worthy of such illustrious guests. But the country is so poor . . ."



Ph. M. O. Williams, copyright N.G.S.

AT THE WAKHJIR PASS, WHERE INDIA, CHINA, AFGHANISTAN AND RUSSIA MEET

"Nothing could touch us more than the cordiality of this reception," answered Haardt.

The man in cloth shoes bowed again. He was the representative of the Amban¹ of Tashkurgan and had been sent to Beyik to meet us. He was the first Chinaman we had seen in Central Asia, and, somehow, among the Kirghiz he seemed out of place. But he was a reminder that Sinkiang was, after all, China—although a far-away, colonial China—and that the city of Tashkurgan was the first Chinese outpost controlling the rather vague frontier.

Haardt's intention had been to stay at Tashkurgan only long enough to pay a visit of ceremony to the Amban. But, as soon as we reached the city, a number of Sarikoli, who were waiting to meet us, seized the bridles of our ponies and led us through the narrow lanes of the Muhammadan quarter to the Residency, which was perched on a hill and fortified like a citadel. We were preceded by an "official introducer" holding Haardt's card between finger and thumb, as if it were an offering. When we were all collected outside the Residency there was a clapping of hands, and the two halves of a worm-eaten wooden gate slowly swung back. We entered and at the far end of a ruined court found a second gate—even more dilapidated than the first. It was not till we had passed through a third portal that we actually reached the sanctuary where the Amban, attired in a felt hat and an old khaki coat minus several buttons, sat awaiting our arrival. He bowed, apparently unable to conceal his pleasure: "To come from so far, to leave such rich and noble countries as yours, to visit our miserable land . . ." He took our hands in his, begged us to enter, bade us sit down. With the tea, the sweets and the cigarettes, he seemed humbly to offer us his house, his country, his heart. And we had expected to be received here with machine-guns!

¹ Magistrate.

"How can I thank Your Excellency for a reception that can only have been inspired by the most exquisite traditions of Chinese hospitality?" said Haardt.

"The indulgence that my foreign guests show me puts me to shame."

To our invitation to take tea with us in our bivouac, the Amban replied with emotion, which if not genuine was well simulated. He would accept this great honour—of which he felt himself unworthy—only if the illustrious travellers would in turn accept the invitation he was so bold as to offer—of taking luncheon with him two days later. Under his breath Haardt cursed, for he had no wish to waste time at Tashkurgan ! That, however, was a purely western conception of values. Here haste was regarded as impoliteness. It was, of course, an imperative necessity for us to get to Kashgar as soon as possible, but to try to make the Chinese understand this would have been a gross lack of taste. Even to speak of it would have been a breach of etiquette. It was impossible, therefore, to refuse the invitation.

The luncheon was served in a bare room, decorated with a portrait of Sun Yat-sen and a few hand-painted scrolls. Everyone was invited to partake of the innumerable dishes which covered the table. During the first few minutes our curiosity was greater than our appetite, and we played with the chopsticks without any desire to use them. But the entreaties of the Amban, of an old mandarin, of the Director of Customs, and of the Garrison Commander, became more pressing. Interpreting our apprehensions as scruples, they fished out the choicest morsels and piled them in a heap on our plates : "Chin. Chin !" ("Please").

As all these tinned shark-fins, sea-slugs, dog sausages and bamboo shoots had been carried up by caravan from the far-away China coast and were the rarest of delicacies at

Tashkurgan, in spite of our aversion, we felt obliged to eat them.

“Kam pei, Kam pei” (“Make your glass dry.” Otherwise “No heel taps”!) Williams, being an abstainer, tried to resist the repeated and pressing invitations to drink. But his efforts were in vain. He was forced to gulp down some of the vile-tasting strong *kaoliang* spirit—only to have his cup immediately refilled. After an hour, Jourdan, who had reached his twenty-fifth cup of wine, was just able to hold up his head; Morizet’s face was flushed; Pecqueur’s eyes had a glassy stare; Iacovleff was trembling from head to foot; and Hackin was becoming hilarious. At this stage bowls of rice and steaming face-towels were brought in. A little rice might certainly have soothed our burning insides; but the towels were distressing. Nevertheless, it was etiquette to use the latter and not to touch the rice, the handing round of which was merely ceremonial. To eat it would have been to imply that there had not been sufficient food.

After the meal, almonds, pistachios, melon-seeds and tea were served in the next room, where Sivel started the Expedition’s gramophone, hoping to bring about further fraternisation through the agency of music. But the Amban also possessed a phonograph, an old horned instrument imported from Russia years before. The youngest secretary wound up this machine, and at its first notes all we Frenchmen rose suddenly to our feet. The Chinese could not understand what had happened and were speechless. Iacovleff did his best to explain to Mullabai in Russian the significance of the “Marseillaise,” but the Siberian Buriat had never heard of a National Anthem.

“It’s a sort of prayer,” insisted Iacovleff, “a religious song for the French. . . .”

“Ha . . . Ha!” The Amban burst into laughter when this was translated to him, slapped his thigh and spat upon

the ground. Never had a reception been more successful ! The French—superstitious people—were certainly original. The Garrison Commander then suggested a competition between the two gramophones to test which could play the louder. Dazed by alcohol, suffocated by cigarette smoke, our resistance gradually weakened.

“ Ha . . . ha ! Ho . . . ho ! ”

Twelve Chinese, the entire Celestial colony of Tashkurgan, came into the room. They looked wonderingly at the little group of Frenchmen, who sat uneasy, shocked and silent. Only Gauffreteau, still full of energy, continued the struggle. Having played all his records but one, he finished by entrusting to Miss Josephine Baker the privilege of defending the honour of western civilisation in this deafening duel of din.

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After Tashkurgan we moved rapidly, making twenty-five, mile stages along a track which meandered through a wide and silent valley. In the distance stood out the snow-clad summits of the Little Pamir, and ahead were the desolate silent spaces of the Saricol Range. On the 12th September winter succeeded autumn without any warning, and we woke up to find our camp covered with snow. The barographs registered an altitude of 13,000 feet. We made an early start for the Ulugh Rabat Pass, going across a country of gentle slopes melting into a vague smother of mist, snow and sky. All around was a monotonous whiteness which the pale sun soon rendered blinding, and Sauvage, who had lost his dark glasses, began to suffer from the glare. He was the first to notice a rather strange phenomenon of refraction. The sun, rising in a dull, dark sky, radiated only a diffused light towards the east, but its oblique rays, passing almost horizontally through a gap in the clouds, struck in the west other white clouds by which



Ph. Morizel, copyright E.C.C.-A.

BY THE EDGE OF THE LITTLE KARA KUL

they were reflected down to the snow. This indirect light was indeed brighter than the direct light of the sun, towards which our shadows fell.

At the summit of the Pass, 13,870 feet up, it was alternately hot and cold, and while our foreheads were covered with sweat, our bodies were shivering. Three hundred yards below, on the other side, the snow had disappeared, giving place to the steppes—Su-bashi.

The three Kirghiz *yurts* at Su-bashi constituted neither a village nor a tribal camp. They sheltered only a social unit—the patriarch, the grand-parents, two families and their numerous offspring. These ingenious dwellings, whose shape, cylindrical at the base and hemispheric at the top, can resist the most violent gales, are constructed entirely of material of either animal or vegetable origin. The frame is of wood, the walls of felt, the pegs of yak-hide, and the guy-ropes of camel's hair.

A few constructions of sun-dried brick were dotted about the valley. From the distance they had the appearance of houses, but actually they were tombs, in which the nomads who had spent their life wandering from place to place were taking their last rest. It was a region of lakes, a sort of dreamland, where everything was double and seemed to live between two skies. As the caravan passed along the shore of the Little Kara Kul a frieze of camels and ponies kept step with it on the calm unruffled surface of its waters. And on this untarnished mirror floated reversed a replica of the peak of the Mustagh Ata (the Father of the Mountains), as clear, as pure and as beautiful as the original. Farther on, towards Basik Kul, were other lakes and other mountains standing on their own reflections ; but this paradise ended with the Valley of Sarikol. Beyond began a purgatory—the gorges of the Gaz. But once out of the maze, when the rocky walls drew aside and revealed the sky, we seemed to be liberated from the tyranny of the mountains.

The 16th September held several surprises for us. The first was a bush, a thing we had not seen for a whole month. An hour later, standing like a sentry, there appeared a poplar, and then a clump of willows, followed by a briar. At Tokhai we were awakened by the crowing of a cock on a farm—the first dwelling of a settled population. The sky seemed to descend lower as the altimeter read 6,000 . . . 5,000 . . . 4,000 . . . The Gaz, now no longer a torrent, but calm and free of its bonds, wound about at ease seeking a comfortable channel. We crossed it sixteen times in one day. Where the ford was deep the camels acted as tugs, towing across the donkeys to whose tails were tied fifteen sheep, which had been presented to us by the hospitable Kirghiz.

Altitude 2,500 . . . 1,500 . . . 1,000 feet. The unshod horses limped, but we were going downward—ever downward. The crests still bounding the horizon were now only low ramparts of rosy-hued granite, which flattened out as we went on. But we were not yet quite out of the mountains, and we rounded each spur only to discover another ahead. Suddenly of their own accord the horses broke into a gallop, which they kept up to the top of a small hill. Ahead was a wheeled cart !

After sixty-five days in the defiles of the Himalayas, the Karakoram and the high valleys of the Pamirs, we had once more reached the plain, with its villages, level spaces, flat roads, trees and cultivation ; with its vineyards, corn-fields, melons and flowers ; and with its sky disclosing the whole expanse of the heavens. Here at last was the plain in its infinite flatness ; and ahead, beyond the distant haze, lay Kashgar.

CHAPTER XII

THE FIRST MEETING

The Tao-Tai of Kashgar—Maurice Penaud's diary—Meeting of the two Groups at Aksu.

MULLABAI HAD DESCRIBED KASHGAR as a land of Cockaigne, where melons could be bought for a penny apiece, chickens for threepence, milk for one halfpenny a jar, and peaches as big as a man's fist for almost nothing. And the first sight of the outskirts of the place smiling in the bright sun of a September morning strengthened the hope that we might be received there with the cordiality characteristic of countries where life is not too strenuous.

But this paradise was not for us. On entering we were met by a messenger from the Governor, who explained that there was no official residence worthy of us and that the Municipality was compelled to offer our "illustrious party" a garden in which to camp. The said garden proved to be a mosquito-infested swamp ; and it took five hours to find an alternative, namely an abandoned house outside the city walls. There we established ourselves, in dusty rooms overlooking a courtyard, which our ponies and camels soon turned into a midden. The change after months of sleeping in the open under the stars was not welcome ! In the morning we looked for a well. " There isn't one. We shall have to learn to make our ablutions with a handful of sand, like good Muhammadans, with prayer for soap,"

said Williams, dipping his shaving brush into tepid coffee and covering his chin with a brownish lather.

Two armed sentries stood at our door, and outside was a subdued and passive crowd. Sauvage and Morizet, who had gone out early to film street scenes, came back at nine o'clock spluttering with anger. The situation was impossible ! Whenever they had tried to set up the camera they had been threatened by soldiers.

At eleven o'clock Haardt and Hackin, shaved and dressed in their best, received the Commander of the Garrison, the Postmaster, and Mr. Pan Si-lu, a lawyer, who acted as interpreter. They had come to announce that the Tao-Tai, or Civil Governor, would call at noon. An hour later, fifteen horsemen with drawn swords clattered up through the crowded streets, clearing the way for a prehistoric bottle-green coach, upholstered with sky-blue silk. As the vehicle drew up before our gate the trumpets sounded a flourish, and from it was helped, or rather, extracted, the Tao-Tai, dressed in a white satin robe and a jacket of brocaded silk.

Whether he was friendly or hostile it was impossible to tell from his finely cut aristocratic face, animated from time to time by a mechanical smile indicative only of official benevolence.

Haardt opened the conversation by expressing through the interpreter his extreme regret at having to receive the Civil Governor in so unworthy a manner. The Tao-Tai apologised in his turn for the meagre hospitality, which was all that his country could offer, and declared his admiration for those who had braved so many perils to come to Sinkiang. Over tea the exchange of polite remarks continued intermittently. Then ensued a silence broken only by the cracking of almonds and pumpkin seeds. The French and the Chinese were observing each other, with obvious mistrust on the one side and some uneasiness on the other.



Ph. M. O. Williams, copyright N.G.S.

“ ON THE 12TH SEPTEMBER . . . WE WOKE UP TO FIND OUR CAMP COVERED WITH SNOW ”

"Tell the Honourable Chief of the Great Expedition. . . ." The Tao-Tai spoke softly, dropping his eyelids—but his courteous and flowery phrases were only a mask. All these long-robed officials, benign as Church dignitaries, had, it seemed, received strict instructions from the Governor-General at Urumchi that the Expedition was not to be given permission to carry on any scientific research or to take moving pictures or even photographs.

Haardt protested that the material which we had collected so far was of serious value as a record, and was to be exhibited to the world, and suggested that it would be very regrettable if in a survey embracing the whole Asiatic Continent Sinkiang alone should be represented by a blank page. To this the Tao-Tai replied that the orders from Urumchi could not be discussed. He again spoke in the kindest tone. But we discovered that it was a case of "the iron hand in the velvet glove," and that the more suave his manner the more forbidding his intentions.

"His Excellency," continued Mr. Pan Si-lu, "has complete confidence in the high motives of the members of the Expedition and will be highly honoured to receive them at dinner."

At this moment, quite suddenly, from among the smiling officials a secretary approached Pecqueur, demanded our passports, and declared that they were not in order and would have to be examined at the office. As both polite compliments and less polite injunctions had been uttered in exactly the same tone, and with the same bedside manner, it was difficult to believe that the conversation had been accurately interpreted.

"Arrived Kuchar. All well. Equipment in good condition. Hope to reach Aksu on the 22nd with four cars. Maurice Penaud."

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From this—the first message to reach us by Chinese wire—we learned that the China Group was only 300 miles away. According to our camel-men, it was possible for us to make daily stages of twenty-two miles, which meant that we could get to Aksu by 5th October. Unfortunately, however, our passports had not been returned to us.

The morrow again brought good news—"Advancing towards you": the following day disappointment—"Forbidden to go farther. Anxiously awaiting you at Aksu." But already these constant changes of mind on the part of the Chinese authorities had lost their power to astonish us, for ever since our arrival at Kashgar we had had a succession of surprises.

Although in China, we saw only Muhammadans around us. Called Eastern Turks by the British, Sarts by the Russians, and Chantos by the Chinese, these worthy folk in their calico caftans and skull caps, in practice knew no other nationality than that of their own oases. They called themselves Kashgarlik, "men of Kashgar." They were an indolent, peaceful people, softened by an easy life, and the Chinese governed them with a handful of soldiers. In Kashgar, according to Mr. FitzMaurice, the British Consul-General, it was possible to live comfortably on a pound a month.

The terrace of the hospitable British Consulate looked out upon an Arcadia in which, so far as the eye could reach, stretched cultivated fields, gardens, vineyards, and groves of lime and plane trees, acacias and willows. Beyond, to the north were the Celestial Mountains; to the south the far distant peaks of the Kashgar Range. It was, indeed, a land of promise. Not far from the British Consulate, and almost facing it, was that of the Soviet; but it was difficult to say which Power exercised the predominating influence in Kashgaria. In 1913 Russian troops tried to occupy the region, and a representative of the Tsar

established his headquarters at Tashkurghan. The Tao-Tai let events take their course, and three months later the intruder died of a strange sickness—poisoned, it was said—and the Chinese gently reassumed control.

The man who told us this story shook his head : “ You will learn to know the Chinese ! ” But in fact the better we knew them, the less we understood them.

Nevertheless, so far as the local officials were concerned, we did know enough to facilitate business by a lavish distribution of presents ; and after eight days of negotiations, we received back our passports, and on the ninth day, our guns, rifles and ammunition. But each weapon was sealed and every cartridge counted. Being ostensibly regarded as too inexperienced to travel by ourselves, we were forced to accept the services of an official guide and an escort of ten soldiers who were told off to accompany us to Aksu. Though the Tao-Tai insisted more than once on the honorific character of this escort and on the necessity for us to have a good guide, we all knew that it was provided only to control our actions. But we made no objection, for by the 26th September, when we left Kashgar, our one and only desire was to join the others.

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It will be remembered that it was on the 6th September, three weeks earlier, that Point at Urumchi had, with great difficulty, obtained the Governor-General's permission to send on four cars to Kashgar to meet Haardt. With the cars went four mechanics—Balourdet, Piat, Remillier and Gauthier, under the command of Penaud. Although Mr. Chen had decreed that only mechanics were to be allowed to make the trip, it was arranged for Carl, who spoke Russian, to go as interpreter.¹ Father Teilhard also went. A Chinese controller appointed by Mr. Chen, the cook Sung, and a Chanto guide completed the party.

¹ Russian is understood almost everywhere in Chinese Turkestan.

The distance from Urumchi to Aksu is 593 miles, Penaud covered it in eighteen days, a daily average of thirty-three miles, which he thought was a record. The following are extracts taken from his log :

Urumchi, Sept. 6th. At five this afternoon Point came galloping back from the city waving a passport. We had waited forty-three days for this moment. By nightfall we had gone fifteen miles. We set up our cots inside a square formed by the four cars and went to sleep. I, who never dream, dreamed that I was back home in Orne, lying in a meadow, when a calf came and nibbled at my hair. The tickling of its breath on my neck woke me up to find a horse's head within a few inches of my face and several mounted men moving about between our cots. It was a patrol. There followed explanations and apologies. They said they had mistaken us for rebel Chantos !

Sept. 7th. Everything went well as far as the Turfan-Toksun fork. Then began boulders—more boulders—boulders for twenty-five miles.

Sept. 8th. Dreadful heat. Father Teilhard told us that it was natural because we were 600 feet below sea level.

Sept. 9th. Rocks. The higher the road climbed, the larger the rocks. The native carts can pass over this track, as they have a clearance of over three feet, but for us it was a different matter. We had to level the track, fill in the holes and move many heavy rocks. It took ten hours to make good a mile. We called this place the Toksun Pass ; it was impossible to remember its real name.¹

Sept. 10th. Thousands of soldiers—reinforcements going to Hami to put down the rebellion. The sun beat down relentlessly. How could the men stand the long marches in the desert, even though they were half naked and their equipment was transported in carts ? During the halts

¹ The Manan, Chose Daban.



Ph. M. O. Williams, copyright N.G.S.

ONE OF OUR SIXTEEN CROSSINGS OF THE GAZ ON ONE DAY

they squatted on the ground exhausted, but still capable of hunting for lice.

One of the officers, chatting with our controller, said : " If you go by Karashah, you will have trouble with your ' carts.' I got over the marshes on fascines, but, even so, several of my carts sank in the mire and had to be abandoned. Don't worry," he added, " in a month or two it will be dry." Wait a month ! Why not a year ?

Sept. 11th. Our Chanto guide made us make a detour around the marshes, but we did not avoid them entirely. The cars got over easily, though the trailers sank in above the hubs. With them we dragged out tons of mud. At Karashah there was great astonishment among the populace. The Chantos and the Mongols settled on us like a cloud of sparrows. They had never seen a motor.

Sept. 14th. We spent three days at Karashah repairing a ferry-boat and building a landing stage on the bank of the Juldüz River. When it was ready the cars were embarked, but the boat, clumsily handled by the Chantos, shipped a lot of water. It was a miracle that the first car did not fall into the river, which here was over twenty feet deep. The other cars we ferried across ourselves.

Sept. 15th. In the evening Gauthier's car caught fire—a leak in the petrol tank. After the others had been moved away, we seized our extinguishers and pumped like the devil for five minutes. Two of us lay under the car, fighting the fire from below, the other three worked from above. When it was extinguished we looked at one another. Everyone was deathly pale. I opened a bottle of brandy. " Lucky we're here to drink it," remarked Piat. " What about it if a hundred gallons of petrol had caught fire . . . ? "

Sept. 22nd. Arrived at Kuchar on the 16th, dusty as millers. Stopped to repair the two petrol tanks but the Chantos invaded the courtyard by hundreds, and made it impossible to work. When the gates were closed they

climbed the walls. Even the roofs were crowded with spectators.

Our host, rubbing his hands, came up to Carl : " Listen, I have an idea ! To-morrow is market-day. Why not charge an entrance fee ? One *lan* to see the cars, two to touch them." He guaranteed takings of five thousand *lan*. " Make an application in writing to M. Citroën, 143 quai de Javel, Paris," replied Carl solemnly.

Left Kuchar on the 20th. On the 21st reached the banks of the Muzart. The river has four broad deep channels. The current was strong and the water very cold, coming, as it did, from the melting snows of the Tian Shan. As the ford used by mounted men was too deep for our cars, the Chantos found another by letting donkeys go across the river. Every time a donkey fell into a hole, it was swept by the current down to the nearest shallow where it regained its feet. This original method proved excellent for locating a ford.

Arrived at Aksu on the 22nd. The dust on the road was knee-deep and soft as dry snow. The lower part of the radiators cut through it like the stem of a ship through water. The trees were all dried up and completely white with dust.

Sept. 24th. The authorities will not permit us to go beyond Aksu, notwithstanding that our passports were made out for Kashgar. Impossible to leave the camp even on foot without being followed by a couple of soldiers. Carl thinks that these measures have been taken to prevent us from divulging what we had seen at Hami.

Sept. 26th. Received the first telegram from Haardt asking us to meet him at Maralbashi. Father Teilhard called on the authorities and tried to obtain permission to go. Nothing doing. Now we are being watched more closely than ever.

Oct. 8th. Our twelfth day at Aksu. Haardt's message said :

"Arriving at noon with sixty ponies and thirty camels." Yesterday Carl was restless. This morning he disappeared. Remillier, who knew the secret, says that a Chanto came to see him last night and asked if he were not a doctor. Carl replied that he could get a good doctor if he had a pony. The Chanto, whose daughter was dangerously ill, agreed, in spite of the orders of the Chinese forbidding the people to lend us animals.

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At dawn on the 8th October twelve horsemen—Haardt's cavalcade—were urging their tired mounts onwards and eastwards. At nine, near the village of Islam-bai, Audouin-Dubreuil unfolded his map for the tenth time. "We shall reach Aksu," said Pecqueur, "by noon."

"Look!" Hackin touched Haardt's shoulder. He pointed at a distant dot that rapidly grew larger. It turned to the left and then came straight on.

"A Chanto," suggested Sivel.

"You must be mad," excitedly replied Morizet, whose eyesight was excellent. "Have you ever seen a Chanto in riding breeches and khaki shirt-sleeves?"

The rider waved an arm, then his hat.

"It's Carl," cried Hackin, "my assistant, Carl!"

By now we could distinguish the blond beard, the glasses, the beaming face. The rider dismounted.

"Mr. Haardt, here I am . . ."

"Alone?"

"Yes; that is——" he replied, stuttering with excitement.

"Yes, the others are there. Aksu is thirty-five *li*¹ from here—they all wanted to meet you—the Chinese—well, we are under strict observation—I managed to escape. A friendly Chanto lent me a pony at the last moment. You . . ." He was getting more and more incoherent.

"How are you?"

¹ About twelve miles.

"Splendid," answered twelve voices.

"Tell us about your journey," said Haardt.

Carl began to talk feverishly about the crossing of the Gobi, the trouble with the Chinese scientists, the fighting between the Muhammadans and the Chinese, of Petro marooned at Hami, of the hold-up of the China Group at Urumchi and the ruse employed to communicate by wireless. . . . All were fit apparently, except Kégresse, who was suffering from appendicitis.

The last march of a ninety-eight-day ride was nearing its end. One more river to cross ! Six miles to go . . . three miles . . . half a mile. . . . We were ambling along a shady lane, when a man fishing in the stream which bordered the lane dropped his rod, waved his arms and ran up.

"At last ! After all these months !" It was Father Teilhard.

We all dismounted and continued together on foot.

"Maurice !"

A short fellow, throwing his beret in the air, ran up to greet his chief. Behind him came the veterans of the "Black Journey" and the first expedition across Africa—Balourdet, Piat, Remillier and Gauthier. Sauvage hummed the "Wedding March." The Chantos stroked their beards and gaped at this hilarious procession.

"And the cars ?" queried Haardt, anxiously.

A little farther on we found them—all four—in a courtyard, looking as if they had come straight from the factory. Penaud opened the bonnets, showed us the engines, made us feel the leather cushions.

Close by, in a shady arbour, was a table laid for nineteen. It was covered with a snow-white cloth and decorated with roses and red carnations. On it were *hors d'œuvre*, roast chicken, salad, whipped cream, coffee, cognac ! For

some moments we could not think of food. The two Groups looked at each other dazed as if each, starting from opposite ends of Asia, had tunnelled right under that continent and had now met in the centre.

“Dinner is served !” announced Remillier solemnly.

On the ground in the only room of the mud hovel, by the light of a flickering candle, lay a Chanto child. Jourdan had just operated on her for abscess of the liver. Now, out of the anæsthetic, she recognised and smiled at the foreigner who had come from so far to attend her. “Tell him that I shall examine her again before we leave,” said Jourdan, in an endeavour, through Hackin’s translation from French into Persian and that of the proprietor of the hut from Persian into Turki, to comfort the poor father of the little girl—the man who had lent Carl his pony.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TOKSUN GORGES

Point's unsuccessful attempt to rescue Petro—Suspense at Urumchi—
Petro's escape—The meeting of Haardt and Point in the Toksun
Gorges.

THUS TOOK PLACE the meeting of the Pamir Group with the advance guard of the China Group. But, as we know, Point had obtained permission to send on the four cars to meet Haardt only on condition that he established wireless communication between the capital and the Sinkiang army. It was for this reason that on the 6th September, he, with the mechanic Chauvet, the interpreter Li, and Kervizic, started eastwards, in the opposite direction from Penaud. They were bound for Ta-shih-tu, the headquarters of the Chinese troops, in order to repair the small wireless-post, which had been set up there for some time, but had never functioned. On arrival at headquarters they found the aerial erected in a deep gorge ; and so soon as it was moved into the open Kervizic very quickly got in touch with the government wireless station at Urumchi.

After the service had been maintained for three days and a Chinese operator trained, Point called on the Commander-in-Chief, General Chang, and reported that, as communication had been established with the capital, his mission was accomplished, and that, having the Marshal's permission, he proposed to try to reach Hami to rescue

Petro, who had been held up there for seventy-two days.

"That is a matter which does not concern me. Have you a *huchao*?"

Point produced the special *laissez-passer* signed by the Marshal. General Chang took it and, without even looking at it, tore it up.

"The Marshal governs the Province, but here I am in command. And you will remain as long as I consider it necessary."

Point, however, had been distrustful and had taken precautions. Without a word he leapt out of the window into the lorry, which was waiting for him at the door, with the other three on board. In a moment they were off at full speed, and the Chinese outposts were soon left far behind. Shortly afterwards a halt was called, and the desert scanned for rebel patrols. But none were to be seen, and a study of the map brought Point to the conclusion that they must certainly be occupying Chi-ku-ching, which was the first oasis some two miles to the west, and on to that place they hurried. But no Chantos were to be seen there—only Chinese—dead Chinese, thousands of corpses mummified by the heat and the extreme dryness, greenish waxen figures more horrible than skeletons, with their eyes pecked out by vultures—all that remained of General Liu's army.

Leaving the oasis, the lorry began slowly to climb a slope between two converging walls of rock. Not a living being was in sight. Suddenly three shots rang out; two hit the back of the lorry, while one kicked up a spurt of dust to the side; and down the hill went the machine three times as fast as it had come up. Point now realised that owing to lack of petrol it would not be possible to go southwards and reach Hami by way of Pichan and the Great Desert, and that there was nothing for it but to give up the idea of rescuing Petro.

To return to Urumchi entailed passing through Tashih-tu and again falling into General Chang's clutches. And, as was expected, when near the latter place the lorry was duly stopped by his orders. On seeing Point, the General enquired ironically whether his trip had been pleasant and added that he was glad to see him back, because the wireless was once more out of order. This was not surprising, for the mast had for "strategic reasons" been re-erected at the bottom of the gorge. Again, it did not take long to reopen communication. The whole party were now under close surveillance. Next evening, nevertheless, they made another effort to escape and got away so suddenly that by the time the surprised guard had seized their rifles the lorry was almost out of sight. All the Chinese post could do was to fire rockets as a signal that the fugitives should be stopped. This signal was taken by the rearguard forces encamped a few miles out as the alarm of a general attack, and so the lorry passed unmolested. Thirty miles farther west was a small village, where there was a military petrol depot.

"Get me twenty gallons of petrol at once ; by order of the Commander-in-Chief," said Li.

The man in charge bowed, the petrol was produced forthwith, and the lorry went on. At two next morning the beam of the headlights lit up the walls of the great city of Ku-cheng, the main caravan-centre of Sinkiang. The gate was locked.

"Open !"

"The gate is never opened at night," a voice replied.
"The keys are at the Magistrate's."

"Wake the Magistrate and tell him that the honourable technical adviser to the Governor has been ordered to Urumchi in all haste on a most urgent mission." This bluff was a sudden idea of Li's. Would it succeed ? Half an hour passed. Then the heavy lock rattled and, after a

moment of breathless suspense, the gate swung open. An officer followed by six men came out and apologised for the delay, explaining that after dark the Magistrate kept the keys under his pillow. He then escorted the "Honourable Technical Adviser" to the other gate of the city. As soon as it was opened, the lorry shot through.

Eventually the party reached Urumchi again. Point fully expected that on arrival he would get into trouble with Chen for this escape ; but that wily diplomat did not even mention the incident. Two days later, however, he made an accusation of a totally different character. He stated that a report had been received from General Chang to the effect that Lieutenant-Commander Point had refused to repair the wireless installation and had carried on anti-militarist propaganda among the troops, and that for this reason the Commander-in-Chief—as he put it—"had been forced to send him back to Urumchi." Point was considerably puzzled by these amazing charges. It is not easy for a European to realise the importance attached by the Chinese to "face" ; but without losing "face" General Chang could not possibly admit that three closely-guarded foreigners had twice escaped from his headquarters, requisitioned his petrol, and succeeded at dead of night in forcing the gates of the richest and best protected city of the Province.

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Brull, Delastre, Reymond and the four mechanics who, instead of going on towards Kashgar to meet Haardt, had been left behind at Urumchi, felt forgotten and abandoned. They had moved from the "Camp of Staunch Resistance" into a house in the "Factoria," the former Russian concession in the town. Here Brull spent the days shut up in his room, and Point on his return found him sitting at a

large table littered with papers. Entirely absorbed in his work, he barely lifted his head.

"I think I've discovered a new method of tracing four-branched curves."

"And what else?"

"Nothing."

Delastre, who occupied a *yurt* in the courtyard (the house was not large enough for everybody), was pasting in an album what he called his ethnological records—pictures of Chinese girls enclosed as coupons in packets of "Hatamen" cigarettes. Piled round him on the ground were Khotan rugs, lynx and fox furs, a basket of eggs and a bag of rice. An ewe and two chickens were tied to the door. These were presents from his patients, which he could not well refuse. One had wanted to bring a cow!

Life at Urumchi was unbearable and the enforced idleness tedious to a degree. The courtyard swarmed with spies, both military and civil, who noted and reported every action. Point stood it for two weeks, and then escaped on horseback to the mountains, to shoot ibex and wild sheep. It was a relief to spend eight happy days in complete liberty among the Qazak, simple hospitable folk who hunted with eagles, much as people in Europe used to hawk in the Middle Ages. On return to Urumchi, he found life even more depressing than before; no letters from France, no news of Haardt, no word from Penaud, none from Petro. What had happened to Petro? The Chinese knew nothing, for they themselves had had no news whatsoever from Hami since the beginning of July. No courier either on foot or on horseback could cross the desert, as the water-holes were in the hands of rebels. Hami might have been captured, sacked and razed from the face of the earth without anyone at Urumchi being the wiser, since General Chang's troops remained stationary.

At three in the morning of the 21st October came a violent knocking at the gate of the house in the Factoria.

"Hullo. . . . Open !"

"It's Petro," shouted Point, jumping out of bed. "I know his voice !"

A lean figure with sunburnt face and sunken eyes appeared in the doorway.

"My dear Petro !" Point rushed forward. "How did you get here ?"

"With Gombo, in the lorry. There it is."

"So you managed to repair it? Did you find the caravan ?"

"I'm afraid that the caravan's as good as lost."

"What did you do, then ?"

"I had a new clutch-casing made at Hami. I found a marvellous blacksmith who forged an iron one. It weighs fifty pounds more than it ought, but it's solid !"

"But how did you get out of Hami ? Is the siege raised ?"

"No, not yet. But it's a long story, and I'm famished. Give me something to eat !"

He began by gulping down two bottles of milk ; then ate a large omelette and attacked a leg of lamb, while the others looked on in amazement. After disposing of some apple-tart and three cups of coffee, he sighed contentedly : "The food is not so bad at Urumchi. It's a bit of a change from *kaoliang*¹ porridge and camel cutlets—which, as a matter of fact, were not always to be had at Hami, especially towards the end——"

"Begin at the beginning," begged Brull. "And tell us everything that has happened since the day we left Hami. Let me see. It was the——"

"The 30th June—nearly four months ago," answered Petro.

¹ Sorghum.

PETRO'S STORY

"After your departure I moved into the city, where General Chu, the Commander-in-Chief, allotted me quarters in the best house, which belonged to a Muhammadan, named Yalbas. As you will remember, I sent the guide Pô to look for our caravan.¹ Well, I told him that if it was impossible to return with the whole caravan he was to bury the loads in the desert, send the camels back to Kansu, and bring on to me case No. 133, which contained the clutch-casing. I felt sure that 'ole man' Pô, who used to be an opium smuggler, would manage somehow to get through the fighting lines. And as soon as the lorry was repaired—possibly in three or four days—I hoped to get out of Hami, in spite of the Chanto patrols prowling round the city.

"Meanwhile news came in of the approach of Mâ Chung-ying's army, and when in the afternoon some horsemen were actually sighted, a panic started. The retreat was sounded, the city gates were closed, and the troops opened fire. This firing continued all through the night, although not a shot came from outside. At noon next day two Chantos carrying a white flag came to the north gate. They were admitted and led to headquarters. They brought a letter from Mâ Chung-ying to General Chu, demanding the surrender of the city. The General read the letter, calmly had one of the messengers beheaded in front of him, and sent the head back to Mâ Chung-ying as his sole reply!

"Pô did not return during the day. That night I was awakened by a fearful uproar—booming of cannon, hammering of machine-guns and savage yells. When I asked what it was all about, my host replied that the Chinese were cowards and were firing because they were

¹ Caravan No. 5, which the expedition had overtaken not far from the Min-Shui Pass. See page 150.

afraid of the dark. Nevertheless, he sent one of his servants to the roof to see what was going on. The man was hit almost at once, and fell to the ground. I climbed to the attic of the house, where from a dormer window Gombo and I had a commanding view of the western and northern approaches to the city. From numerous points on the wall the Chinese were firing flares which gave a certain amount of light. There were no enemy on the glacis, but a little distance beyond, among the bushes, could be seen the flashes of their muskets. Suddenly, to the beating of drums and the blowing of trumpets, the glacis swarmed with men rushing towards the high city wall. The front rank consisted of Chinese peasants¹ carrying scaling ladders, who were driven forward by Tungan soldiers armed with huge curved swords.²

The air was rent by the shrill battle-cries of the Tungans and the yells of defiance of the defenders. In spite of a murderous fire, ladders were placed at different spots, and the rebels, like red monkeys, began to climb up one after the other. Then the defenders discarded their firearms for pikes and axes, and hurled down on the attackers heavy rocks, blazing tow soaked in oil and hand-grenades—from which in their excitement they forgot to withdraw the safety-pins. Notwithstanding the stubborn defence, several scaling ladders were placed against the wall, and the Tungans clambered up one after another. Many were speared or pushed away, but as they fell to the ground others took their places. Then the cannonade ceased, and only the clash of steel, the cries of the wounded and an occasional pistol shot could be heard as hand-to-hand fighting began on the wall itself.”

“ Exactly like the Middle Ages,” Point interjected.

¹ These were Chinese from Kansu whom Mâ Chung-ying had impressed and treated as slaves.

² These swords are called in Chinese “Kui T'ou Tao,” which means literally “cut-head-knife.”

"No, not exactly, because just when the place seemed to be doomed, a machine gun, which up to this had been silent—probably forgotten—suddenly came to life. Emplaced in a blockhouse flanking the wall, it opened fire, mowing down the assault, and the glacis was soon cleared except for the heaps of corpses. The assault was repulsed. Three times that night did the rebels renew their attempt to storm the place, but each attack was less determined than the last, and all were beaten back. At dawn they retreated, leaving only enough men to snipe any Chinese who showed their heads above the parapet. The garrison might now have attempted a sortie without any great risk, for a Shamanist sorcerer had somehow found out and reported that Mâ Chung-ying was preparing to take all his Tungan troops over to Barkul. And two days later round Hami there were actually only about 1,000, holding in check a garrison of 6,000 Chinese regular troops. But the old General did not trust the sorcerer, and feared a trap.

"I thought it a favourable moment to try to reach Kumul,¹ in order to get some news of Pô and our caravan. I therefore went to see the colonel commanding the west gate and presented him with a pair of field-glasses, which so pleased him that he not only permitted me to go out, but, what was more important, promised to let me in on my return. I departed then and there, and did not come back for eight days. Once outside the city, I was immediately taken prisoner and conducted to the rebel headquarters. There I learned that Mâ Chung-ying, who had returned from Barkul on the previous day, had seized our caravan, commandeered the camels and impressed the drivers. Not only did he refuse to give up the loads, but he gave orders that I should be sent with some other prisoners to the mountains to look after the herds. And if I had not met Colonel Kemal, an ex-officer of the Turkish Guard, who

¹ The Muhammadan city situated about five hundred yards outside Hami.

was acting as Chief of Staff for the rebel forces, I might be a shepherd now. He was very kind and entertained me at headquarters as his guest.

"Although I appreciated his hospitality, I was anxious to get back to Hami, where I had left Gombo and the lorry. At first there seemed little hope of doing this, but then an opportunity presented itself. During the week I spent with the rebels they renewed their efforts to capture the city by assault, and the place seemed ready to surrender. On the eighth day an officer appeared on the wall, carrying a white flag. He wished to parley, and asked for a deputation to come in to discuss terms of capitulation for the fortress. But Mâ Chung-ying, remembering how his former messengers had been received, was little disposed to send anyone. I then offered my services as an envoy. My offer was accepted at once, and the same day I was conducted under escort to the rebel outposts.

"I crossed no-man's-land alone, waving a white handkerchief. Not a shot was fired ; but, as I got close, I saw rifles levelled at me from every loophole. When I reached the Chinese outpost near the west gate, which was out of sight of the rebel lines, several soldiers sprang at my horse and dragged me off. One of the men had me nicely covered with his rifle, when the city gate opened, and my friend the Colonel, who recognised me, rushed out, kicked the soldier violently, and the shot went into the air. The field-glasses had not been forgotten.

"I was then conducted to General Chu's headquarters, where the whole Defence Council was assembled. My arrival caused great excitement, and everyone plied me with questions until the General silenced them by knocking on the table.

" ' Did you see Mâ Chung-ying ? ' "

" ' Yes. ' "

" ' Is it true that he is only twenty-one years old ? ' "

“ ‘Yes.’

“ ‘Gentlemen!’ The General got up with an effort, supported on both sides by his bodyguards. ‘I am eighty-one years old, and my hair was white before Mâ Chung-ying was born. How dare you ask me to surrender the city to this infant robber, this suckling . . . to this *Tzei-Wa-tze*?’¹

“The members of the Council hung their heads in shame, and agreed unanimously to defend the place to the bitter end. After this decision had been recorded in the minutes, the Food Commissioner, in reply to a question from the General, stated that there was sufficient food for the troops for two months, but that the forage for the animals was already nearly exhausted.

“ ‘As you see,’ concluded the General. ‘Not only must we defend the city, but we must make a sortie and beat the rebels in the open field in order to collect some wheat.’

“ ‘Hao-shuo, hao-shuo,’² assented all the members of the Council. ‘Let’s all go out and fight.’

“ ‘You cannot all go at once because some troops must be left to protect the city,’ continued the General. ‘I propose, therefore, that the senior officer among you, Colonel Hsiung, command the sortie. His great valour will be a guarantee of success. “Hsiung chih ma!”’³

“Everyone laughed at the General’s joke except Colonel Hsiung. ‘Of course I could beat Mâ Chung-ying with ease,’ he protested, ‘but as my regiment occupies the key position of the city, my presence here is imperative. I therefore suggest that Colonel Tu lead the attack.’

¹ This word (literally *Tzei* means thief and *Wa-tze* in Western China is the slang for “cub”) was coined by General Chu on the spur of the moment. The old mandarin, a good psychologist, knew how to raise the morale of his troops by playing on the Chinese traditional respect for old age, which results in a certain contempt for youth. On the next day all the soldiers were derisively calling Mâ Chung-ying “*Tzei-Wa-tze*.”

² “Hear, hear.”

³ A pun on names. “*Hsiung*” means a bear. *Mâ* (Mâ Chung-ying’s first name) means a horse. *Hsiung chih ma*—the bear eats the horse.

“ Colonel Tu replied that he was much flattered by this proposal, which he regarded as the greatest honour he had received in the whole of his career, but he felt it his duty to draw the attention of the honourable members of the Council to the fact that he commanded a cavalry regiment, that unfortunately his horses were weak from lack of food, and that he could not force his men to fight on foot. The two other Colonels also adduced very good reasons for not leaving the shelter of the city walls, Colonel Chang’s men being too old and all opium smokers, and Colonel Shih’s being raw recruits, too young and inexperienced to be entrusted with such an important duty.

“ ‘ Then I shall go,’ announced a very fat man—the Civil Magistrate commanding the militia.

“ ‘ A civilian ! ’ Everyone laughed, and the General put an end to this delicate situation by adjourning the meeting. He declared that as the matter was of great importance, no hasty decision should be taken.

“ I returned home. Gombo’s joy at seeing me gave way to depression when he learned that I had not brought the spare parts. He was very pessimistic about the whole situation.

“ ‘ If the Chantos take the city, they will murder everyone ; if they don’t—we shall all starve. We can’t cross the desert on horseback or on foot, and our lorry is broken down. What are we to do ? ’

“ ‘ All will be well ! ’ I reassured him by saying that we would have a new clutch-casing if he would find me a blacksmith, some iron and some coke.

“ But there was no blacksmith, no iron, no coke. Everything had been requisitioned for the defence. My scheme could not be carried out, and there was nothing for it but to await the arrival of a relief column from Urumchi, which the Chinese thought was bound to come any day. They also had great confidence in the strength of the high

city walls, which had so far withstood all the efforts of the rebels. Two weeks later, however, their complacency was completely shattered when the enemy fired a mine and blew a large breach in the wall. If it had not been for one of Colonel Hsiung's officers, who covered the breach with a machine gun, the Tungans and Chantos would have taken the place then and there. That night Mr. Yuan, adviser to General Chu, came to see me. He was much perturbed and begged for information as to European methods of preventing an enemy from mining the walls of a beleaguered city.

" ' Find me a good blacksmith, some coke and iron,' said I, ' and I'll guarantee to protect the city against any more mines.'

" Mr. Yuan agreed. So I made the defenders dig a trench round the wall, to below water-level. The rebels, who had no pumps, were unable to mine under this trench, for their galleries were flooded and the powder was rendered useless.

" As for me, I got my blacksmith. I took the broken clutch-casing off the lorry and explained that I wanted a jacket forged to fit very closely over it. I intended to rivet the thirteen pieces of the broken casing to this jacket, which would hold them together in place. The man said he could do the job, as, though he was really a locksmith, he had been a blacksmith, as had been his father and grandfather before him. He was a big, athletic fellow, and he handled hot iron as if it were clay, plying his hammer with remarkable precision. In a week the jacket was finished and capable of being adjusted to within less than a millimetre. But then he had to make his own bits and employed Chinese methods of drilling. This was a long and tedious job, as he took more than a day to each hole, and there were over thirty of them. In forty days the lorry was repaired, and I had some means of transport. But how was I to get away ? "

Day was beginning to break. Petro yawned. " Let's go

to bed. I'll tell you the rest to-morrow." But we all implored him to go on.

"By the beginning of October, three months after you left, though Mâ Chung-ying had tried to storm Hami forty-three times, he had not succeeded in taking it. Meanwhile the garrison had been reduced from 6,000 to 2,500 men. Famine was raging, horses, camels, mules, in fact all the animals except the dogs—which were unclean—having been slaughtered for food. Flour had long been exhausted, and a soldier's daily ration consisted of only a pound of *kaoliang*. What sustained the men was opium. They could not have held out without it, and so long as it lasted and no strenuous effort was demanded of them they could get along on practically no food. At night the opium lamps of the sentries could be seen sparkling like little stars the length of the ramparts. The whole garrison was in fact intoxicated. It was fantastic !

"Gombo and I fared pretty well on pigeons which I caught at night, under the eaves of the house, with an electric torch. In this I was more successful than the Chinese, who used to shoot at the birds and as often as not drove them away by the noise. As the food situation grew worse and worse, murmuring began among the soldiers, who openly talked of surrender. Of sixteen messengers who had been sent to Urumchi since the beginning of the siege not one had come back. General Chu, however, would not hear of capitulating, and it was owing to his spirit that the resistance continued. But finally the pressure on him became so strong that he agreed to send a party composed of the Imam and other notables to parley with the rebels. The Holy Man came back alone. 'Unconditional surrender' was Mâ Chung-ying's reply.

"It was then that Mr. Yuan called on me for the second time. His gloom was even greater than before.

" 'If relief does not arrive by the 1st November, the city

is doomed. Urumchi must be informed of the situation. Would you like to try to escape ? ’

“ In reply to my query, he said he hoped that Urumchi had not fallen, but admitted that the General’s Intelligence staff was not only without information as to the extent of the rebellion but had no plan even of the enemy positions around Hami. As General Chu had given instructions that I was to have anything I wanted to assist me in my plan of escape, I asked for two prisoners, whom I wished to question myself. I was at once given full authority to get them in whatever way I could.

“ Actually, I bought them. I knew that a certain enemy trench about 100 yards from the city wall was guarded at night by only two men, though a large picket was always there during the day. I offered 3,000 *lan*¹ to four Chinese soldiers to creep up to this trench in the darkness, armed only with knives, and to seize and gag the two rebels, and bring them back to me unharmed. Next day they produced two Chantos, from whom I found out that neither Urumchi nor Turfan were occupied by the rebels, and that only a small number of troops remained around Hami, their main forces being concentrated east of Chi-ku-ching.

“ This intelligence enabled me to devise a plan of escape. I decided to leave Hami at night, pass the enemy lines and get as far as I could before daybreak. In the day-time I hoped to hide the lorry in the desert, and to start again next night towards the Chol Tagh Desert, and so gain Turfan. From that place it would be easy to go on to Kashgar.”

“ You thought that we were at Kashgar ? ” interposed Brull.

“ Of course.

“ On the night of October 16th, the one hundred and ninth day of the siege, a company of soldiers, which was

¹ About £75.

placed at my disposal, made a breach in the city wall. As the success of my venture was their only hope, they worked feverishly, in complete silence, carrying away each brick by hand. General Chu personally came to say good-bye, and gave me his old gold watch as a token of his confidence. He also brought a bottle of brandy and twelve pounds of stale crusts of bread—all the food he could spare.

“ Our party consisted of four—Mr. Yuan, who was going as the General’s special courier, Gombo, a Chanto guide and myself. At 1 a.m. the breach was practicable and, as the lorry passed through it to the north, the garrison made a demonstration—firing rapidly from the southern sector of the defence in order to attract the attention of the enemy and to drown the noise of our engine. Our way at first led through an ancient cemetery, which had been in course of time invaded by the desert. Beyond this I had, the previous day, observed a path winding among low sand-dunes, but in the pitch darkness neither of us could pick it up. Gombo then walked ahead, feeling the ground with his feet. A couple of hundred yards from our starting point we stuck in the sand, and several shots were fired at us. I stopped the engine, and we strove with hands and shovels to dig out the wheels. A few minutes later, as the Chinese began shooting again, we moved on slowly ahead in first gear, making a terrific noise. Just as we got out of the soft sand on to hard soil Gombo spotted the outlines of mounted men. There was only one thing to do—to switch on the headlights and drive the car straight at them. Their horses, scared by the noise and blinded by the light, scattered in all directions and we passed on. Fifteen minutes later, as the sky in the east was reddening, we stopped. We were seven miles north of Hami, on a barren gravel plateau. Farther north were the Karlik Tagh Mountains, the rebels’ stronghold ; to the west, ahead of us, lay Mâ Chung-ying’s main body ; and south of us,

occupied by his troops, was a chain of oases along which passed the main road from Hami to Urumchi.

“By 4 p.m. we had advanced eighty miles westwards along the piedmont gravels, and it became necessary to change our course to the south to gain the Chol Tagh Desert. But to do this we had to cross the main road, and as through my field-glasses I saw carts, camels, and troops moving along it, we hid the lorry in a ravine and waited until night. It was pitch dark when we started again. The nature of the ground obliged us to pass—with lights out—close by a small rebel fort. We heard voices and the barking of dogs, and if a patrol had found us at that moment, our goose would have been cooked, for the ground was so rough that we could travel only in bottom gear. After waiting until midnight we went on. Our luck held, and by daybreak we were deep in the desert, safe from pursuit.

“According to the guide an old track led direct from Hami to Turfan through the Chol Tagh. This track, called the ‘Road of the Three Perils,’ had been abandoned about eighty years earlier because of the terror inspired in travellers by these three perils—Thirst, Hunger, and Demons—who raised whirlwinds.¹ Our guide assured us that we were bound to cross it about a dozen miles south of the rebel fort, but though we looked very carefully for any traces of it, we found none. Finally, when we were thirty miles south, we stuck in a pocket of very soft sand. It took us a whole day and a night to get out. Looking back, the deep tracks of our wheels were the only marks I could see on that endless barren plain. Ever since dawn we had been going steadily down hill, descending from a plateau 2,500 feet high to a depression almost below sea-level. To retrace our steps was impossible; only a track-machine could have climbed the sandy slope. We were

¹ The depression where the road of the “Three Perils” passes is marked on Sven Hedin’s maps “Die Wüste der Winde.” Violent whirlwinds occur there frequently owing to the peculiar atmospheric conditions.

now reduced to six pounds of dry bread and two cans of water.

“ ‘Where is the road?’ I asked the guide, who, as exhausted as the rest of us, was sitting on the ground swaying backwards and forwards.

“ ‘Oh, Allah!’

“ ‘You said it was only one day’s march south. We’ve gone twice as far!’

“ ‘Oh, Allah!’

“ ‘Something tells me that he never knew the way,’ Gombo remarked quietly.

“ ‘Why did you say you knew the road?’ Getting angry, I shook the man by his cloak.

“ Falling on his knees, he confessed that he had never been over the road himself, but had heard of it from his father.

“ ‘I lied to you because I wanted to get out of Hami.’

“ During the next three days we wandered blindly in a north-easterly direction, traversing dunes, salt-marshes, ravines, and labyrinths of high aeolean mesas of clay. On the third night a sand-storm got up and raged for hours, and threatened to bury us. Only half a cup of water per person remained, but there was still some in the radiator. Next morning the storm abated, and after we had driven for several hours, Gombo suddenly took me by the arm.

“ ‘Stop. Look.’

“ ‘I saw nothing but dreary, gravel-covered hills.

“ ‘It’s an *obo*.’¹

“ Gombo pointed with his forefinger to the horizon.

“ An hour later we struck the road of the ‘Three Perils’ and by evening, when we had got to the end of our food and our water, we reached Chiktam, the first oasis outside the rebel zone. That was yesterday.”

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¹ See note, page 133.

On the 23rd October Mr. Yuan, primed with Petro's intelligence, reported the critical situation of Hami to Marshal King, who immediately ordered General Chang to break through the rebels and relieve the city at all costs. In the circumstances he could no longer refuse Point and Petro a *laissez-passer* to go to meet Haardt, who a few days previously had telegraphed to Urumchi that he had met Penaud at Aksu on the 8th October, and had passed Kuchar.

With every mile of the journey westward Point's excitement increased. After passing Toksun, he could hardly contain himself. The moment for which he had waited seven months was approaching. All difficulties had been mastered, the desert crossed, enemies outwitted, and many pitfalls avoided. To be on time at the rendezvous in Central Asia, selected in the Place de l'Opéra, Paris, seven months earlier, seemed incredible.

"We may meet them at Karashah, for it will take us at least twelve hours to get over the Pass," said Chauvet, looking critically at the mass of rocks in the Toksun Gorges.

Suddenly he stopped ; rubbed his eyes. Was it a mirage ?

"Look !"

From a jumbled mass of boulders a hundred yards ahead a track-car had emerged and stopped. Motionless by it stood a tall, slender figure. Point ran forward. He recognised the face : he heard Haardt's voice :

"Well done, Point. Thank you !"

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE TRAP OF URUMCHI

United at last—An audience with Marshal King—The foreign colony at Urumchi—Winter comes—The arrival of Salesse—The passport to freedom.

ON THE 27TH OCTOBER at Urumchi the whole of the Expedition was for the first time gathered under one roof. Of its thirty-one members who found themselves seated at a long table with their leader all were impatient to exchange experiences, while those who had not met before were eager to make each other's acquaintance. Asia had not appeared in the same guise to all. To the members of the Pamir Group it had seemed a friendly continent, a succession of picturesque scenes—entrancing ruins, golden cupolas and mosaics, dances and festivals, precipices and fantastic canyons, inaccessible snow peaks, glaciers and hidden lakes lying asleep close under the skies.

For Sauvage, "The Roof of the World" had been an enchanting pastoral symphony—the dream of his life. Penaud, on the other hand, had only unpleasant memories of bad going, sand-storms, dead camels, and headless corpses. For him the last seven months had been one long nightmare. But at any rate, it was all a thing of the past. The hardest part of the task was over. The Groups were together, and Peking was not more than six weeks' journey away. Hackin alone did not share in the general cheerfulness.

Father Teilhard and Reymond had had the opportunity of carrying out at least some scientific research and collecting valuable material, but he had been prevented from doing any work among the ruins which we had passed on the way from Kashgar (the Kizil grottoes, and the monasteries of Shorchuk, etc.), and he greatly feared that he might also be forbidden to carry out any at Khara Khoja, Murtuk and Bazaklik—the famous “Land of Dead Cities” in the vicinity of Turfan, which was the real object of his journey. Haardt, however, was quite confident that he would be given a free hand by the Marshal.

Two days after our arrival, His Excellency, Marshal King Shu-jên, Chairman of the Sinkiang Provincial Government and Commander-in-Chief of the Northern Defence Forces, granted a formal audience to Georges-Marie Haardt, Leader of the French Expedition. In the reception room, which contained a copper bedstead and six mahogany armchairs, Haardt found Mr. Chen, the Commissioner for Foreign Affairs—bowler hat on knee—sitting motionless as a Buddha. After an interval of five minutes the door opened and twelve of the Marshal's bodyguard, with Mauser pistols and cartridge belts complete, entered and lined up along the walls.

“Tsing li !” (“Salute !”)—the Marshal came in. He was dressed in a plain khaki uniform, and wore no decorations except the insignia of his rank—three gold stars. His face was devoid of expression, the muscles which generally react to surprise, interest or emotion, seemed completely paralysed, and the yellow parchment-like skin adhered closely to the skull, retracting his half-closed eyelids. Bowing deeply, he invited Haardt to be seated, with a side-glance indicating an armchair. Tea and cigarettes were then passed round. The interpreter—who had just arrived—stood impassive, waiting for orders. After what

seemed an appropriate interval, Haardt thought he might venture to break the silence.

Haardt (in English) : " Will you please tell the Marshal how greatly honoured I am to meet the man who governs this large country with such exemplary wisdom and firmness. I should like, also, to express my admiration of his brilliant statesmanship which has brought peace and prosperity to a province inhabited by so many different races."

The Interpreter (in Chinese) : " The foreigner says that he presents his respects to Your Excellency."

The Marshal (with a slight nod) : " T'ai k'o chi." (" Very polite ! ")

The Interpreter (to Haardt, in English) : " His Excellency is greatly touched by the sentiments which you are good enough to express, and enquires whether the local authorities who, alas, often fail in the proper execution of their duties, have adequately facilitated your journey through our poor country, devoid of roads though it is ? "

Haardt, by no means a talkative man himself, was greatly impressed by the Chinese language in which so much could be said in so few words.¹

" Since my arrival in Sinkiang," he continued, " I have everywhere received the most effective help and generous hospitality. If any misunderstandings occurred before I came, I have already banished them from my mind, and I beg Your Excellency to do the same."

The Interpreter (in Chinese) : " The Chief of the foreign Expedition apologises for the past incidents which were due to the youth and inexperience of his subordinates."

For the second time there was a long silence. More tea was poured out and more cigarettes were offered.

Haardt : " Long before leaving Paris I had hoped that

¹ The truth is that the Chinese interpreter was carrying out his rôle exactly. He did not translate. He *interpreted*, transmitting to his Chief only the essence of the visitor's speech and embellishing the former's brief replies.

some day I would meet Your Excellency, and that Your Excellency might condescend to accept this trifling gift"—he put his hand into his pocket, and the twelve guards, who were watching his every movement, at once gripped their automatics—"the work of one of our most renowned French craftsmen," continued Haardt with perfect composure, taking out of its case a gold watch, thin as a leaf, which chimed minutes and seconds.

"What is that?" The Marshal lifted his eyelids in slightly perceptible surprise.

The Interpreter : "The foreigner has brought you a watch."

The Marshal took the present, and, without even looking at it, handed it to the guard standing behind his chair.

This gesture implied that "His Excellency greatly appreciated the magnificent present and accepted it as a token of goodwill."

Haardt decided that the moment had come to present a memorandum containing his demands, which were : a passport for the Expedition ; freedom of movement for its members ; and permission for the archæologist, the photographers and the artist, to work in their respective fields.

The Marshal enquired what the document was. On being informed that it was a petition, he rose from his seat—to intimate that the audience was at an end—with the words : "Have it sent to the Secretariat."

The Interpreter (to Haardt) : "His Excellency thanks you for your visit, and begs to inform you that as your memorandum touches matters of an administrative nature, it will be dealt with by the department concerned."

"Tsing li !" And the Marshal, followed by his guard, escorted Haardt to the third gate—a compliment and mark of high esteem.

"Well ?" asked Hackin, meeting Haardt at the bivouac.

"Well, nothing ! The Governor is a man of few words."

"Did he grant any of your requests?"

"Not exactly. . . . He accepted my present as if it were tribute . . . without even looking at it."¹

The sterile exchange of empty compliments lasted for over a week, during which time the "competent authorities" gave no sign. But the Marshal invited all the members of the Expedition to a gala luncheon on the 15th November, which meant that it would be impossible for it to leave before the second half of the month.

Meanwhile Iacovleff spared no effort to create a friendly atmosphere. His pictures had excited the admiration of the Mandarins, who all expressed a wish to have their portraits painted by him. The result was that he spent his days driving about the city in an old coach, calling on all high officials. He returned home every night tired out and much regretted this waste of time and opportunities, for Urumchi offered a diversity of human types rarely to be found in one place, even in Central Asia: Torhut Mongols from Dzungaria, with their flat, moon-shaped faces; swarthy Chantos, with burning eyes and silky beards; red-faced Qazaks, wearing yellow silk bonnets lined with fox-fur; fine-featured Sibo Manchus disdainfully picking their way among the Tungans quarrelling in the noisy streets of the bazaar. . . .

"An unknown world," lamented Sauvage, as, forbidden to use his camera, he strolled idly through a city where at every step he saw scenes that had never yet been screened—Chinese cooks juggling with steamed noodles in the open air; merchants weighing out rock salt; prisoners chained together by the neck, begging for alms; a Taoist temple, its "hell" full of devils in green hats; at every turn the unexpected!

¹ Haardt did not know, and his ignorance is comprehensible, that according to Chinese custom all gifts must be wrapped in red paper, and that it is impolite to examine a gift in the presence of the donor.

One day he invited some Qazaks to the bivouac to sing their folksongs. They arrived dressed in their best. But the entertainment was brief, for no sooner had they begun their performance in front of the sound-film camera—Sivel conducting and Morizet attending to the pictures—than half-a-dozen Chinese policemen appeared in the courtyard, and, with an apology to us, escorted the budding cinema stars to the police station. Here each was fined two *lan*¹ and severely reprimanded for associating with “those foreigners.” Obviously in the eyes of the police we were beyond the pale.

Dr. Norin, the geologist of Sven Hedin’s expedition, who had been for many months at Urumchi, was leaving shortly. Overjoyed at getting away, he gave a farewell reception and ball for the foreign colony, to which he also invited some of us. He received his guests at the doorway of the large hall decorated with pine branches, paper lanterns, and flags, in which the party was being held.

“Do you mean to say, Doctor, that you have already received your passports?”

“Already! I’ve waited more than a year!”

“Congratulations!” interposed a gentleman in spectacles, sighing enviously. This was Mr. Gmirkin, a fur merchant, who held the monopoly for the export of *Breitschwanz*,² and was also the director of the local garage, or military automobile park. The fact that out of eighty cars some twenty were in running order was, in view of local conditions, a sign of great efficiency on his part. He was consequently regarded as indispensable, and though permitted to make all the money he could in Sinkiang, he was not allowed to leave the country. Incidentally he was one of the wealthiest men in Urumchi.

Groups formed here and there in the ball-room, the

¹ About a shilling.

² Skin of unborn lamb.

ladies sitting along the walls, and the host made the introductions. Several White Russians—bye-products of the revolution, three Germans, a Finnish lady married to an Englishman, our Danish friends, Mr. and Mrs. Kierkegaard, and we ourselves represented Europe in this forsaken corner of the globe. A balalaika band struck up a mazurka, and the couples, mostly exiles and victims of misfortune, began to dance. Many of them had led adventurous lives. Delastre's partner, the blonde Madame Hetchess, for example, had twice crossed the Gobi alone with a Chinese camel-caravan. A young German engineer sent out to Sinkiang for six months by a Hamburg firm had been waiting two years for the Governor's permission to go home.

"Hullo, Doctor, glad to see you," said someone in English to Williams. The speaker was the young Princess Nirgima of Torhut, who had been educated in Peking and spoke excellent English, French, Russian, Chinese, and Mongol. "Life is so depressing here," she continued, "do take me with you back to Paris."

"Why don't you go?"

"I am waiting for my passport!"

And so on. Nearly all these people were waiting for their liberty. Those we saw had not lost all hope. But hidden away in the city were other Europeans, miserable folk, forgotten and debased by misery—a few poor shopkeepers, two Poles who earned their living by making brushes, a former Tsarist official who never dared to leave his room for fear he might be robbed of some imaginary treasure. . . . Haardt listened in silence to all the "hard-luck" stories poured out. It was plain that the same thought was passing through his mind as through ours: "We must get out of this trap!"

On the 15th, Marshal King gave his luncheon. On the table, laid European fashion, in one of the pavilions of

his "*yamen*"¹ towered a centre-piece of copper-gilt surrounded by giant fowls in aspic, fancy pastries, flowers, fruit and a whole galaxy of bottles. The Marshal's official cook, a Russian, who every Sunday prepared a standard menu for diplomatic receptions, was responsible for this meal. Curiously enough, hosts and guests took their seats opposite, instead of next to, each other, sixteen Frenchmen in a row being on one side of the table, and sixteen Chinese facing them, like chessmen set out before the beginning of a game. Anyone looking at this party of thirty-two people would have remarked the striking and radical dissimilarity of the two races. We, the French, with our expressive faces and stoutly sewn pea-jackets, seemed—in the history of the world—young. The sixteen mandarins in silken robes, sitting backs to the light, appeared ageless. They certainly belonged to an era anterior to ours, and their smiles, like coins worn smooth by use, could not be accepted at "face value" in the currency of genuine sentiment.

Seated next the Marshal was old General Chu, who had returned the previous day from Hami. He had been received in triumph because, thanks to his staunchness, that city had held out and so given time for General Chang to concentrate the force which finally broke through the rebel lines. The rebel commander, Mâ Chung-ying, had been wounded in the fighting, but had succeeded in escaping with his troops back to Ansi ; and all danger of a fresh invasion seemed, for this year, at least, to be entirely removed.² Sunk deep in his chair, the Marshal, eyes half-closed, preserved his habitual mask, turning his head towards a speaker without listening, looking without seeing, nodding without understanding, and smoking

¹ Official Residence.

² The following spring, 1932, a fresh invasion by Mâ Chung-ying provoked a general revolt of the Chantos in Sinkiang as far as Kashgar. Many towns, including Hami, Barkul, and Urumchi were sacked and partly destroyed. Marshal King fled and the political situation remained very unsettled.

innumerable cigarettes, which were lit and inserted into his long jade cigarette-holder by one of his guard.

The seating arrangements did not permit of general conversation. On one side of the room everyone talked in French, on the other in Chinese ; and when, from time to time, through Petro's intermediation, there was some exchange of ideas across the table, both Haardt and the Marshal were careful to avoid any allusion to current affairs. General Chu, flushed with his recent success, was the only person to show any spirit. He spoke in a loud tone, and boldly interrupted the Marshal, whom he called " King," to show that he dared to treat the powerful master of Sinkiang as his equal.

We all did honour to the Russian port, the vodka, the cassis and the brandy. This thawed the company slightly ; and with a view to fostering a more genial atmosphere and cheering things up our hosts proposed round games—the object of each of which was to make the loser drink.¹ It was not possible, however, to banish the uneasiness caused by the presence behind one's back of the guards, with their Mausers—perpetual reminders of the fact that in Sinkiang human life was cheap. The Marshal seemed more uncomfortable than anyone else. At a similar reception two years previously his predecessor, Governor Yang, had been assassinated in the presence of his guard.²

At the end of the banquet, which lasted three hours, Haardt expressed a desire to return the hospitality which the Marshal and his Ministers had offered to the Expedition. To this Mr. Chen replied that the Chief of State was

¹ The " Finger game "—a sort of poker played with fingers instead of cards ; and the " Match game," in which a lighted match is set in its box and passed around the table ; the person in whose hands it goes out having to empty his glass.

² Governor Yang Tseng-hsing, greatly respected and liked by everybody, was assassinated in 1929 as a result of an intrigue stirred up by one of his best friends, Mr. Fang, then Commissioner for Foreign Affairs. As Mr. Fang was shot on the spot, King, at that time no more than a General, profited by the general confusion, seized the official seal of the Provincial Government and proclaimed himself Governor-General. On becoming master of the country he feared a similar fate, and never dared to go out of his palace without a strong guard.

greatly flattered by the kind invitation, which he accepted with pleasure—for the 29th of the month.

“The 29th? But I expect to leave before then.”

“Why should you be in such a hurry?” protested the diplomat urbanely. “Are you not happy here? His Excellency is so busy with affairs of State that he can accept invitations only for Sundays. Unluckily he happens to be engaged next Sunday and is compelled to postpone partaking of your kind hospitality until the following week.”

That meant that we could not leave Urumchi before the beginning of December.

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Haardt became seriously perturbed. The repeated delays had already set his time-table back by three months. And now, instead of crossing Central Asia in early September—the good season, when the heat is over and the cold had not yet begun—he was obliged to make preparations for what he called his “winter campaign.” As our cars had been designed for tropical conditions, our first care was to protect the engines against the cold by means of fur hoods, to line the cars with felt, and to make special heating arrangements for warming them.¹ Our tents of aeroplane cloth were very light and therefore unsuited to a country where in winter even the natives sleep under felt tents. Sheet-iron stoves had therefore to be made at Urumchi. By way of winter clothing, we thought first of lining our “Shackletons” and leather jackets with fur, but experience had taught us that there was nothing to equal the common sheepskin which, when still fresh and greasy, is warmer than the most expensive furs. Here Carl, the assistant archæologist, once more proved useful. He measured us in masterly fashion, bought hundreds of

¹ Warm air from the engine bonnet was conveyed into the inside of the car by a pipe from behind the ventilator.

sheepskins and supervised the making of coats, boots, caps, and gloves.

The question of food had also to be carefully examined. Not only had Mâ Chung-ying seized the caravan which had been sent to Hami with supplies and spare parts, but there was every probability that our Ansi stock had likewise been looted by his troops. The first depot on which we could count on our way eastwards, therefore, was at Suchow, about eight hundred miles south-east of Urumchi. We therefore bought at the *Sovtorg*¹ barrels of sausages, sacks of rice and dozens of tinned crabs, which the Soviet Government export in great quantities to Sinkiang.

Our cash reserves were seriously depleted by these unforeseen and costly purchases. To get more money Haardt could, of course, have applied to the Marshal who, in accordance with an agreement made before the Expedition left France, was ready to advance any sum in Sinkiang currency against payment in silver dollars to his account in Tientsin. But such an operation would have been complicated and slow, and almost prohibitive, as the rate of exchange imposed by the Governor—two *lan* to a silver dollar—was exorbitant. Fortunately most of the Urumchi trading houses were agencies of Tientsin firms; and the local merchants secretly offered to cash our cheques on Tientsin at the rate of over five *lan* to a dollar. Their action was not due to lack of confidence in the local paper currency—at Urumchi they could buy gold either in dust or in ingots in the open market—but because it was very difficult to make money transfers to the coast. Usually they balanced their accounts by sending merchandise to Tientsin, but this year, owing to the rebellion, not a single caravan had left Ku-cheng. Our cheques were therefore rated higher than specie.

Each day since our arrival had been spent in negotiating

¹ Soviet Government Syndicate for foreign trade.

with the authorities, but we did not seem to get a step nearer our goal. Haardt's requirements, however, were quite simple :

1. Authorisation for Hackin, the cinema operators, the photographers, and the artist, to work in the ruins near Turfan.
2. Passports for Brull, Kégresse, Jourdan and Carl, whom business, or health, obliged to return to France via Siberia.
3. A general passport authorising the Expedition to leave Sinkiang.

The Chinese agreed in principle to these three points, although they never admitted the receipt of express instructions to that effect from the Nanking Government.¹ On the contrary, we were told that, in spite of the fact that the Central Government had cancelled our passports, the Marshal would give the necessary permits. But the inevitable reply to the question "When?" was "Very soon"; and no date was ever mentioned, though the month of November was slipping by. A cold wind swept the dusty streets and the thermometer dropped daily until it fell to 14° below zero.

Without home-letters or papers or news from the outer world, we waited wearily from day to day in enforced idleness. The mechanics lost their keenness. Some of them had been in this plight for over four months, and their nerves had become as frayed as their phonograph records. Imprisoned in the heart of a continent two thousand miles from the nearest ocean, we began to look upon the sea as a symbol of freedom and deliverance. On the evening of November 20th, when we were at dinner, a stranger entered the room. He was in sporting get-up and carried a pair of field-glasses.

¹ See page 186.

"Let me introduce myself, M. Haardt," he said, dropping his monocle, and speaking French with a slight Southern accent, "I am Salesse. I have brought with M. Citroën's compliments the three cars which you ordered last September. I have also some letters—not very recent because I left Paris fifty-three days ago—but I expect they will be none the less welcome."

The three cars, spare parts, and wireless equipment were those ordered by Haardt before he left Misgar !

"Forty-two cases and three sedan cars," continued Salesse, "everything straight from Paris via Berlin, Moscow, Novosibirsk and Chuguchak in fifty-three days. I left Paris on the 18th September and forty days later arrived at Sergiopol, the last railway station in the Kirghiz Steppes. From there I sent the cases to Chuguchak by Russian lorry. Up to the Chinese frontier everything went smoothly because I speak Russian ; but at Chuguchak it was another story. When I asked if the French Expedition was still at Urumchi, I was told that the ' Franssouski ' had left long before, and that I should find none of them. I decided to see for myself, shipped my forty-three cases by mule cart to Urumchi, and arranged to go ahead with the cars. To do that I needed two drivers ; and I got them—one was a locksmith who had not driven for eleven years, and the other a watchmaker who had never driven a car in his life ! I gave them a few driving lessons and off we started on a 600-mile journey over a road which everyone told me was extremely difficult because of the marshes and river-crossings. On the second day out it began to freeze, and in the morning the cars refused to start. I broke two crank-handles, and had to take off and clean the self-starters, which were choked with frozen mud. Next day, when we were still over 200 miles from Urumchi, one of the drivers bent his front axle, and the other ran into a cart and broke his windscreen. The dust was so thick

that the springs and even the bottom of the radiators had to plough through it, and the engines were continually getting choked. I prayed for rain ! It snowed during the night, and for a while the road was better, but the snow began to melt, and one after the other my three cars got stuck in the mud. After Manas I had engine trouble, and twenty miles from here I had to abandon the car with the bent axle. Ten miles farther the second car got bogged, and as I could find no oxen to haul it out, I came on in the third."

"Where is it ?" asked Haardt.

"Almost here . . . five miles up the road. I came on on foot."

"Why ?"

"Because the car would not move."

"Why wouldn't it move ?"

"If I knew," sighed Salesse, "I would not have walked."

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The three cars were towed into Urumchi by one of our track-machines, repaired, and delivered to Marshal King. Next day he granted two of Haardt's three requests—a passport for the "France Group" and a passport for the "Turfan Group." The former—consisting of Brull, Jourdan, Carl, and Kégresse—left Urumchi within twenty-four hours. The latter, under the leadership of Audouin-Dubreuil, comprising Hackin, Father Teilhard, Williams, Iacovleff, Sauvage, Morizet, and Sivel, started on the 23rd November. They had permission to excavate among the ruins and to take moving pictures of the Dead Cities, but were strictly forbidden to photograph any of the people.

On the 28th November, Salesse's forty-two cases turned up, and the Marshal received some of the longed-for equipment—which probably accounted for his wishing Haardt "Bon voyage" at the luncheon given to him next day.

Although on this occasion the Marshal was the guest, the party was held at the *yamen* because according to the custom at Urumchi the Head of the State could eat only food prepared by his own cooks, and served by his own body-guard, in his own dining-room. All that the host was permitted to do was to go to the palace an hour in advance to supervise the preparations and to pay the bill.

On his way back from this reception, Haardt received an official envelope of imposing size, sealed in many places. It contained a large sheet of thin rice-paper—the Marshal's *huchao*—on which was recorded the following :

“ The Chairman of the Provincial Council of Sinkiang and Commander-in-Chief of the Frontier Defence Forces,

“ In regard to the matter of passports, declares :

“ That Monsieur Haardt, Chief of a party of French travellers is permitted to proceed with—

“ Members of the party (twenty-six names) ; automobiles, nine vehicles.

“ They propose to travel by Turfan, Hami, Suchow, and the grass land.

“ They have approached me with an humble petition and I, approving their request, have granted to them this *huchao*.

“ In order to enable the military and civil authorities and the police to facilitate their passage, these persons are requested not to create difficulties and not to take away prohibited objects.

“ In this way they will avoid punishment.

“ 20th year of the Republic of China, 11th moon, 28th day.

“ Commissioner for Foreign Affairs.

“ (Seal) CHEN.”

Chairman of the Provincial Government
and Commander-in-Chief.

(Seal) KING SHU-JÊN.

Witness of the affixture
of seals.

(Seal) HSU WÊN-PING.

“ The passport to freedom ! ” sighed Haardt, who was yearning for the wide open spaces, the happy nomad life awaiting us, the unknown Asia which lay ahead.¹ Opening a window for a breath of fresh air, he saw that the *yurts* and the cars in the courtyard were hidden under a thick white mantle of snow. Winter had come.

¹ On leaving Urumchi, Haardt entrusted to Salesse the duty of taking back to France some of the records of the Expedition and the collections made in Sinkiang. Salesse's journey was not uneventful. When his wheeled transport was blocked by the snow he went on in sledges in the cruel cold. He then was held up by three brigands who wished to examine his cases. He shot a couple of their horses and got away safely in the confusion. Leaving Urumchi on the 1st December, he arrived a month later at Sergiopol, where he took train to Moscow, and reached Paris on the 19th January. All his packages were safe, though the seals had been broken, the locks stolen and the fastenings cut. Everything had been inspected and turned upside down in the U.S.S.R., but nothing was missing.

CHAPTER XV

BAMIAN AND THE DEAD CITIES

A historical retrospect—A glance at Bamian and the archæological remains on the road to Urumchi—Hackin obtains permission to work at Turfan.

IT WAS BECAUSE Haardt had planned to follow one of the great trans-continental routes of the expansion of Buddhism towards the East that Joseph Hackin had joined his Expedition. This distinguished archæologist had already devoted many years to the study of that religion, but had confined his own field of work to Afghanistan, Northern India, Korea and Japan. Though Afghanistan had been the birthplace of certain aspects of Buddhist Art during the first centuries of our era, these had extended all the way to Japan, where Buddhism had replaced Shintoism as the State religion. The Expedition, therefore, offered to Hackin a unique opportunity for exploring a zone in which lay many places of the greatest archæological interest and of following the course of the doctrine which from its source in India has influenced the unstable and turbulent civilisations of Central Asia towards stability and peace, idealism and renunciation.

These places, clustered so thick along this track in the sands of the Gobi, had, it is true, been explored since the beginning of the century by several expeditions, one of which was Japanese, and the excavations carried out had brought to light many manuscripts, sculptures and frescoes. But, in spite of the extremely important discoveries made by Stein, Grunwedel, von Lecoq, Pelliot,

Oldenburg, Kozloff and others, there was still an immense field for further research, which explained Hackin's keen desire to obtain permission to work in the Turfan region, and his impatience to start operations.

The history of Central Asia prior to the fourth century B.C. is still very obscure. Like an ocean, the Gobi Desert separates three great coastal civilisations—the Chinese to the east, the Indian to the south, and the Iranian to the west. On the north, this immense "cell without a nucleus" was bordered by regions peopled by nomad tribes, which to-day are supposed to have been of Indo-European speech—called Scythians and Sarmatians, who were Turanians and cousins of those Iranians who founded in Persia the Achæmenian Empire of Darius and Xerxes.

It was between the years 330 and 325 B.C. that Alexander the Great by his sweeping conquests linked up the history of Central Asia with that of ancient Greece and Rome. Within a period of five years he destroyed the Achæmenian Empire, occupied Sogdiana (now Russian Turkestan), Bactria (Northern Afghanistan), and conquered North-Western India and the Punjab. Although from a political point of view this brilliant epic adventure had no lasting effect upon India since the Macedonian domination, ceased at Alexander's death, it brought Hellenic influence to bear on the western borders of Inner Asia for at least two and a half centuries. Archæology explains how this politico-religious contact came about, and shews that though the power of the Selucids—the Greek successors of Alexander—and of the Greek princelings—Demetrius Eukratides, Diodotus, Euthydemus, etc.—who followed after them, steadily declined, they ruled over Bactria until about the year 50 B.C.

Now, in India, there had for a long time existed a dual

theocracy, and it is highly probable that the Greeks sought to consolidate their own position by associating themselves with one of the two great Indian religious systems—Brahmanism and Buddhism. The Brahmans, with their caste-system, ignored the overtures of the Greeks, whom they looked upon as outcasts ; but the Buddhists, whose religion was open to all, were able to accept a form of political alliance with Hellenism. This is confirmed by coins found throughout the entire Indo-Afghan region and by ancient texts from which we learn that a Greek king of the Punjab, Menander (in Pâli *Milinda*), debated with certain Buddhist patriarchs the Buddhist thesis of the “substantial non-existence of the ego”—that ego-self which is the source of all passion and egoism.

These philosophical conversations must have taken place in the second century B.C. They were, however, of no more than passing effect, because one of those sweeping displacements of populations so characteristic of Asia occurred shortly afterwards and forced the Greeks finally to abandon the heritage they had received from Alexander. The new invaders, called Yüeh Chih or “The Moon Tribe” in the Chinese records, came from the north and were descendants of the Scythians. They had lived on the frontier of Western China—in what is to-day the Kansu Province, until they were driven out by the Hiung Nu (Huns), neighbouring barbarians of Turco-Mongol origin.

Fleeing westwards, on their way across the Gobi, the Yüeh Chih seem to have left behind them a certain number of their people who settled in the oases. But the great majority of the tribe went on farther and reached Sogdiana, Bactria and finally North-Western India, where they supplanted the descendants of the Macedonians. Once firmly established there in the place of the Greeks, these nomads, now known as Indo-Scythians, because of their hereditary tendencies, shewed a willingness to preserve

the framework of the preceding civilisation. At the same time they embraced the Buddhist faith.

In less than two centuries they founded an important Indo-Scythian dynasty, whose most famous king, Kanishka, ruled over a region which included the present Russian Turkestan, Afghanistan, and Kashmir. Converted to the doctrines of Sakyamuni, this powerful ruler became a saint, convoked religious councils, and ordered the codification of the Scriptures. For that reason he is often called the "Clovis of Buddhism." In the art of this period, also, we find an expression of the association of the Greeks and the Indo-Scythians with the Buddhists of India. To begin with, the Greeks taught the latter to work in stone and so to translate into that material the motives of their former wooden architecture. They thus gave a fresh impetus to the ancient Indian art and created an image of Buddha, of whom until then there had never been any representation, for the reason that the supreme aim of the Buddhist religion is the elimination of personality. His first material representation was in the shape of a radiant and youthful Apollo draped in a peplum. And Greek plastic art, blended in this religious iconography with the spiritual originality of India, was responsible for the hieratic type of Buddha which has ever since dominated Asia. As is often the case with converts, Kanishka and the other Indo-Scythian emperors were seized with a passion for proselytising, and sent out missionaries who carried these holy effigies of Græco-Buddhist art along the Central Asian trails to the furthestmost limits of the Gobi.

But waves of barbarians continued, as before, to roll down from the north, and in the fourth century the Hun Empire broke up, thereby causing a new distribution of populations. The Turco-Mongols overran the Chinese

Empire and took possession of all Northern China as far as the Yellow River. Known as White or Ephtalite Huns, their hordes invaded Sogdiana, Bactria and even the Punjab. Their chiefs were rabid iconoclasts who spared nothing, and they drove away the Indo-Scythians, massacred their Buddhist monks and ravaged on all sides with fire and sword. Three centuries later, the only traces of the Græco-Buddhist civilisation originally attained in the Indo-Afghan region was to be found in the oases of the Gobi.

The history of the origin of the small independent peoples of the kingdoms of Kucha, Karashah and Turfan is rather curious. They are of Indo-European stock and descended from those Indo-Scythians who dropped out during the adventurous migrations to India and settled where cultivation was possible. Being distantly connected with the Iranians of the West, they speedily established relations with them.

Caravan-traders from Sogdiana catered for their material requirements—even to the provision of Persian cosmetics and perfumes, whilst Buddhist missionaries catered for their spiritual needs and supplied the mystic inspiration for which their aristocracy craved. Thus the people of Kucha, Karashah and Turfan, sometimes called Tokharians, developed in these remote spots of “innermost Asia” an advanced civilisation which lasted from six to seven centuries.

In the seventh century, conscious of the perils which threatened them from all sides, they became concerned as to their relations with their two powerful neighbours—on the east the Chinese of the T'ang dynasty, and on the north the Western Turks, who by that time had replaced the Ephtalite Huns. They had to walk warily so as not to antagonise either, and finally accepted a dual vassalage. But the time came when they had to make a definite

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choice. Unfortunately, they sided with the Turks against the Chinese, and, as a result, the victorious armies of the Son of Heaven struck them a mortal blow. Even though the life of the Græco-Buddhist civilisation was prolonged by the Uigurs (tribes affiliated to the Eastern Turks) until about A.D. 1000, it was eventually submerged in the great Islamic wave which brought about the final conversion to Islam of Kashgaria and the other oases of the present-day Chinese Turkestan.

Yet, in the giant crucible which is Central Asia, Buddhism has acted as a catalytic agent. Having itself been subjected to certain Greek and Iranian influences, when penetrating China, Korea and Japan, it passed them on, thus forming a link between all the civilisations of the ancient world.

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Thirteen centuries ago a pious Chinese pilgrim, Hsüan Ts'ang (whom Sir Aurel Stein calls his Patron Saint), crossed Central Asia on his way from China to India. His journey was made in a direction contrary to ours, but there were points of similarity between the two ventures. Starting from Singanfu, the former capital of Cathay, he traversed the Gobi Desert along the chain of oases and passed through Sogdiana to Bamian.

It was at Bamian, also, that Hackin, on his arrival from Japan, awaited the Pamir Group in May, 1931. One of his old hunting grounds, this spot was now to be the starting point for an archæological excursion on a grand scale right across Asia. It was a natural halting place for caravans on their way from Samarkand to India, being situated on one of the former Sacred Buddhist Roads, between the Greek and Indian halves of the Empire of Alexander the Great.

Standing in front of the two colossal Buddhas carved

in the rocky cliff, Hackin drew our attention to the treatment of the wavy hair and the monastic cloak draped after the Greek fashion over the shoulders, which proclaimed them to be Hellenistic. And then, explaining the mural paintings inside the grottoes, he made us appreciate the extent to which the artists—three centuries after the erection of the figures—had borrowed from the Sasanid civilisation of Iran. When the last Greek princelings had been ousted by the barbarians, their Indo-Scythian successors imposed on the priestly artists new conventions in decorative art—floating ribbons, jewelled ornamentation, vases and diadems. The family groups of princely figures on either side of the Buddha at which we were looking wore Sasanian headdress crowned with globes and crescents, and the Buddhas were in full dress. Then, in the vestibule of a sanctuary, he pointed out a ceiling decorated with medallions engraved with boars' heads. These, as Iacovleff remarked, were very similar to those adorning the robes of one of the Persian emperors on the frescoes at Tak-i-Bostan, near Kermanshah.

Nevertheless, in Sinkiang four months later, on the first seven stages of our journey eastwards from Kashgar, we observed traces of Islamic art alone. Our path, which wandered between the little islets of verdure scattered about the sandy or rocky desert, was frequented only by Turks—the men driving donkeys laden with brushwood; the women in fur-trimmed caps, with pink, green or white veils across their faces; and near the villages were gay groups of pretty little girls with pigtailed wound round their heads.

It was not until the 3rd October, when we were on the eighth stage, skirting one of the outlying ranges of the Tien Shan, that we saw, almost buried in the sand of a low schistose spur to our right, the ruins of the ancient Buddhist city of Tumshuk. But when some of us made a move in

that direction the controller put in charge by the Tao Tai of Kashgar suddenly made his presence felt : " All scientific work is forbidden." What he regarded as " scientific work " was not clear. We knew that excavations were not allowed, but could hardly imagine that a simple visit would be prohibited. The controller, however, insisted—became more categoric : " You are authorised to travel only along the road—not to leave it."

And until we reached Aksu, all that we were allowed to see on our way were poor hovels of sun-dried brick with roofs of willow or poplar branches, sand and dust, the small forests of stunted, discoloured tamarisks, sunken roads bordered by willows, pools of alkaline water, steppes, and beds of gravel.

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On the 14th we arrived at the village of Kizil, close to Kucha. At Aksu our caravan of ponies and camels had been replaced by four track-cars carrying a fresh stock of films, instruments and sundry comforts. Though the grottoes of Kizil had already been visited and exploited by von Lecoq, Stein and Pelliot, they still had an outstanding interest for Hackin, and he was on tenterhooks lest he should be forced to pass by without so much as a glance—as had happened at Tumshuk. Luckily at Aksu our controller had been relieved by a new man—a " guide "—and equally fortunately, Penaud had at this moment to stop to repair the axle of one of the trailers ! The result was that the guide was persuaded to allow Hackin and four other members of the Expedition to visit the grottoes, which were only a couple of hours' walk south of our bivouac. He himself joined the party to make sure that no notes, and particularly no photographs, were taken.

As at Bamian, the grottoes were dug in the face of the soft cliff-side of a valley and were hidden from sight by

a screen of young poplars in all their golden autumn colouring. Just below them was a small hamlet, and there the present appeared to have gone to sleep—among the willows and jujube and barberry bushes. But as soon as we entered the sanctuaries a glorious past rose up in all its freshness and seemed to light up our steps. The interior surface of the walls had been worked smooth a thousand years before and covered by a layer of clay coated with plaster on which had been painted scenes from the life of Buddha. Hackin interpreted the meaning of these with his usual virtuosity. There was Buddha in Nirvana, enveloped in his rainbow, or taming the white elephant. There were also some of the innumerable legends woven round him of his incarnations : that of the child so poor that he could offer to the Divinity only a handful of dust, and who in reward for this gesture became the mighty King Asoka ; that of the monkey about to rob a tree of its honey to offer to Buddha ; that of the division of relics amongst the worshippers in order to prevent war between those who preached peace ; that of the giant mouse which suckled the new-born child of a dead woman ; and that of a Nagi—the Queen of serpents—carried off by Garuda in the guise of a double-headed eagle. This last was the Gandharian version of the legend of the rape of Ganymede by Jupiter.

But the artists of Kizil had not only illustrated legends ; they had also depicted their own epoch. The whole galaxy of the knighthood of Kucha—the “ men of our race, with pure oval faces, long straight noses and well arched eyebrows ”—lived again on these walls. And, looking at the paintings of elegant Kuchen mail-clad nobles, Grousset’s masterly description sprang to our minds.¹

“ . . . Sometimes the coat of mail reaches down to the knee, in the Sasanian fashion ; more often it only covers

¹ *In the Footsteps of the Buddha*, by René Grousset (London : George Routledge & Sons, 1932).

the shoulders and chest, the stomach being protected by a corselet of flexible bands. As for the Kuchen sword—we are familiar with it—the long straight sword with slender hilt in the form of a cross, and pommel shaped like a ball, a mushroom or a fleur-de-lys. It is the great two-handed weapon of our knights, the sword for cut and thrust. Scabbards and handles are, moreover, wonderfully worked, in a design of roses, stars, coffers and flowers, which bears witness to the taste of these noble lords. . . .”

“. . . and here, finally, we meet Kuchen ladies. Here they stand, benefactors and devotees, thronging round the altars of Buddha in their entirely worldly elegance. They pass before us in their rich bodices, which are shaped to the bust and fit tightly round the waist, opening out on either side of the throat to form the large Kuchen revers, their long trailing skirts, billowing and flared as the fashion decreed ; revers, belt, and edging of bodice and skirt being embroidered with the pearl and flower trimming so dear to the Tokharian.”

“. . . as for the colours of the women’s costumes, jackets of milky white, with pale blue revers and brownish-purple border, and white skirts with violet stripes ; olive-green bodices, with white borders ; black bodices, with the trimming of white and green ; white bodices with black trimming ; blue bodices with gilt border ; green or pale-blue skirts striped with yellow . . . colours of a bygone time, costumes of another age, worn by the fair ladies of a vanished race, in the heart of the Gobi Desert thirteen hundred years ago.”

Hackin would have given anything to be able to spend a week at Kizil, where he found sufficient material for an entirely original work. But all that he had was a few short hours ! And it might well be that we were the last

Westerners to admire the remains of this civilisation, which in spirit and in some of its aspects was curiously like our own ; for fifty years hence what will be left of these exquisite frescoes, already seriously damaged by the weather and by the depredations of the Turks, searching in vain for a treasure which was before their eyes though they failed to recognise it.

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On the 20th we arrived at Shorchuk. It was a mild, still day, as, led by Hackin, we scrambled over the hillocks of soft earth to a group of ruins. The first of these consisted of small monastic cells, open to the sky, with clay walls and earthen steps. They had been ravaged by time and the elements and were of no particular interest. But near them stood a surprisingly large number of sanctuaries. Hsüan Ts'ang passed by here on his way to Turfan ; and from him we know that in this region there once existed ten monasteries sheltering two thousand monks. They were all similar in plan—a vestibule, usually in ruins, a Holy of Holies containing a figure of the Buddha, and a circular ambulatory. Some of them had been ransacked ; but others were intact and bore on their walls distinct traces of figures in high relief. In this one nothing was left but the sockets for the wooden pins which had once supported a statue. In that stood the remains of figures of such perfect proportions that the action of time had not been able to rob them of their inherent beauty. Though they showed signs of Iranian influence, the arrangement of the draperies and the hair and the masterly treatment of the body proved that they were of classic inspiration.

They dated from the sixth to the eighth century, and were made of earth mixed with chopped straw built upon a skeleton framework of reeds to support the arms, the

legs and the torso. The closer to the surface, the finer was the straw.

Near a group reminiscent of the Descent from the Cross—the figure of an old man supported under the arms by attendants—stood a half disintegrated vaulted panel, apparently part of an arcade. What still remained was solid, causing us to speculate as to the nature of the material that had enabled these structures to defy the winds of the desert, the assaults of the sand and the extreme variations of temperature for fifteen centuries.¹ They were made of earth, sun-dried brick, or beaten clay, which crumbled to the touch. One semi-circular arch, almost Romanesque in shape, revealed the secret of its humble construction. It had been turned on a frame of osiers, or willow branches, bent into a curve which served as a reinforcement for the natural cement.

As we scrambled over mounds of debris from one sanctuary to another we suddenly came upon a head, then a leg with a beautifully modelled knee, an acanthus leaf, a fragment of cornice, and two hands with long fingers clasped together in mystic ecstasy. These beautiful things were ours for the picking up. But our first feelings of admiration and joy changed to uneasiness when we remembered the presence of our guide. Would he regard the collecting of such precious objects as scientific work?

Hackin was in ecstasies at the treasures he beheld. After examining a small torso of many colours, from the girdle of which the drapery fell in folds suggestive of Greek inspiration, he handed it to the Chinaman, with the remark that it was a specimen of outstanding interest, and that he hoped the Governor of Urumchi would appreciate the importance of these archæological sites and would take measures to preserve them. The guide put the figurine in

¹ In these regions the temperature often changed thirty degrees within a few hours.

his pocket. In the meantime, Iacovleff, who had picked up a foot, was carefully removing the soil from it, first with a penknife and then with his handkerchief, until its graceful shape was fully revealed.

"The second toe is longer than the big one," said Jourdan, "which is in accordance with classic tradition."

Giving the foot a final wipe, Iacovleff solemnly presented it to the guide, who very soon had more than he could carry. The grottoes were of less importance than those of Bamian or Kizil, except for some fragments of mural paintings. Most of these had been mutilated either in iconoclastic frenzy by Muhammadans, or in excess of zeal by archæologists. But those that remained were of great beauty.

Hackin was much interested in a painting in which were depicted a Tibetan cloak and Chinese masks, for there all civilisations seemed to be joined in common pursuit of the same mystic ideal: Sasanian—the pearl ornamentation; Iranian—the details of decoration; Greek—the gestures and attitudes; Indian—the sensuality and grace of the voluptuous faces with heavy eyelids; and Tantric Buddhist¹—a many armed Siva. Farther on, a ceiling, still intact, attracted attention because of its fresh and vividly original floral decoration, recalling the designs of some of our mediæval tapestries. It showed Buddhas in meditation framed round by lotus-stalks, blossoming in the sky and rooted in rippling water on which sported young ducks with Chinese eyes but Sassanian in form. By its frenzied gestures a warrior-demon was recognisable—the prototype of the fighting genii invented centuries later by Japanese artists.

Fantasy, colour, mystic power met us at each step we took in these grottoes half smothered in sand. And though these incomparable monuments to the poetic sense of man

¹ A Tibetan form of Buddhism.

were little more than ruins, they yet had power so deeply to stir the emotions that men of the twentieth century suddenly dropped their voices as if fearful of disturbing the still perceptible breathing of a dead and gone inspiration.

A few days later, when we arrived at Urumchi, we realised of what small account to Marshal King were the relics of the past. Sable coats, motor-cars, arms and wireless installations were more in his line.

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In the seventh century the Kingdom of Turfan, which the Chinese called Kao Ch'ang, was one of the most important States of Central Asia, as is shewn by the number of the ruins of formerly prosperous localities, such as Bazaklik, Murtuk, Senghim and Kara Khoja. And when, on the 20th November, Haardt obtained the Governor-General's permission for Audouin-Dubreuil's (scientific) detachment to visit Turfan, Hackin, overjoyed at the chance of at last getting on with the research for which he had come, selected the site of Bazaklik, twenty-five miles east of Turfan, as a starting point. He and his party, consisting of Father Teilhard, Williams, Iacovleff and Sauvage, with his two cinema operators, set to work. While Father Teilhard spent ten days making a geological survey of the region, the others, under Hackin's direction, carried out a thorough study of the locality. As we had no official permission to make methodical excavations (there was still much to be discovered), Hackin had to confine himself to reconstructing on paper the plan of the sanctuaries, the taking of rubbings of inscriptions and the selection of mural paintings to be copied by Iacovleff.

Twenty years earlier, von Lecoq had laboured at this same spot, and traces of his activities were found ; but though he had removed whole panels, much of great value was still left. Work now went on without ceasing from



Ph. M. O. Williams, copyright N.G.S.

A DEAD CITY : KARA KHOJA

morn till night. The cold was so intense that Iacovleff had to improvise a metal palette which he could heat with a blow-torch so as to be able to mix his distemper with water, and paint quickly before the colours froze. Despite this difficulty and the numbness of his fingers, he managed to make accurate copies of all he saw.

One painting was particularly interesting because it shewed details of a Manichæan¹ occupation of Bazaklik previous to the advent of Buddhism: "Decoration in distemper on a thin coat of coarse plaster barely concealing the inequalities of the rock wall, and in its simplicity contrasting with the opulence of the work of the Buddhists. The latter, who took the place of the Manichæans, had in no way spoilt the productions of their predecessors. They had just hidden them by giving an internal brick lining to the walls and roofs."²

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Later, at Kara Khoja, a comparison of the monuments still in existence with photographs taken barely twenty years earlier showed how great had been the deterioration even within that short period. Indeed, it looked as if their disintegration had reached a critical point—all were crumbling to dust. And for that reason Williams, with American thoroughness, photographed everything he could.

Hackin felt that his own efforts had not been in vain, for he, too, had been able to save from the pitiless action of time a few masterpieces of art, by which the Dead Cities of the Gobi—likely in twenty years' time to be reduced to ruins as shapeless as stalagmites—might be preserved from oblivion.

¹ The Manichæan religion was founded in Persia during the third century by Menes or Mani, on elements borrowed from both Christianity and Mazdeism.

² These few lines do not pretend to give even a rough idea of the results achieved by the Expedition in the domain of archæology. It remains for M. Hackin to give to art amateurs and experts an accurate work in which the documentation will be analysed, commented on in detail, and supported by appropriate comparisons.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ROAD OF THE "EIGHT EIGHTEENS"

Towards Peking—General Chang, Liberator of Hami—The great high road across China—Digging for petrol and oil at Hsing-hsing-hsia.

SPRING SEEMED TO HAVE LINGERED at Khara Khoja, where on the 2nd December Haardt and the main body of the Expedition joined the scientific detachment ; and in the warmth and sunshine of this depression 600 feet below sea-level we soon forgot the bitter cold of Urumchi. Hackin was more than satisfied with the results of his work, for, though limited as to time, he had been able to accomplish a good deal, with the valuable collaboration of artist, photographers and cinema operators—assistance which archæologists rarely have at their disposal.

We were at last relieved of the Chinese controller ; and to reach Peking as soon as possible was our one wish. Our spirits rose at the thought of saying good-bye to Sinkiang and getting in touch with the outside world. That evening, for the first time since leaving the Camp of Staunch Resistance three months previously, we rigged up the wireless mast. And, while Father Teilhard, hammer in hand, diligently searched with the aid of an electric torch for some geological formation noted five months earlier on the way to Urumchi, the rest of us gathered round the wireless car, hungry for news. Kervizic was watching the needle of the ammeter carefully, afraid that the *Waldeck Rousseau* might have given up listening for the Expedition

after so many weeks' silence. No sooner did he start sending than there was a flash and a crack.

"The condenser's gone phut," he said, taking off his ear-phones. "And it's our last!"

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Sinkiang is connected with China proper by a chain of oases lying south of the Gobi Desert, at the foot of the Nan Shan Mountains. From time immemorial this narrow strip of land has been the natural route for migrating tribes, and during the last thousand years has served as the path of Chinese conquerors attracted by the riches of Central Asia.

The famous high road, over 3,600 miles in length, which passes through these oases in north-western Kansu, is called by the Chinese the "Road of the Eight EighTEENS" (Pa-shih Pa lu), because between Peking and Urumchi it is divided into eight sections of eighteen stages, each ninety *li*¹ long. While camel caravans generally used the much shorter route across the Gobi,² the Chinese officials and merchants preferred to travel by cart along the beaten track, which was provided at regular intervals with fortified posts where food, water, fodder and protection were to be found. The reason for extending the Great Wall to the west of the Yellow River was to guard this national highway against raids from the north.

The intention had been to follow the road of the Eight EighTEENS from Sinkiang to Liangchow, in order to visit the famous Buddhist shrines near Tunhuang³ and certain parts of north-western Kansu which are comparatively little known, and, accordingly, petrol and food had been dumped at Hami, Hsing-hsing-hsia, Ansi, Suchow, Kan-chow and Liangchow. Hami had been relieved by General

¹ A *li* is roughly a third of a mile, but in this case a ninety-*li* stage is not thirty miles, but the distance that a mule-cart can make in one day.

² This route has been well described by Owen Lattimore in his book *The Desert Road to Turkestan* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co.).

³ Chien Fo Tung, or the "Caves of the Thousand Buddhas."

Chang on the 1st November, but the revolt had not yet been completely crushed and fighting was still going on. Haardt, who had by now acquired a distaste for any dealings with Chinese generals, would have liked to avoid the place, but this was impossible, for in addition to supplies, the China Group had left there in July Father Teilhard's mineralogical collections and Reymond's specimens of animals and insects. On the night of the 5th December we pitched our tents outside its walls, and next morning received our first blow—the entire stock of oil and petrol had disappeared.

“And what about my snakes?” cried Reymond.

“Petrol, oil, spare dynamos, minerals, herbarium and snakes—all gone,” announced Petro. And while the naturalist bewailed his lost serpents, the geologist mourned for his “pebbles.”

It was very extraordinary, for, before escaping, Petro had left the property of the Expedition in the care of the authorities. Now the store was empty, all traces of the official seals had been carefully removed from the doors, and General Chang, who after relieving the town had succeeded General Chu, not only disclaimed all knowledge of the matter but, when Petro went to see him during the morning, confiscated our passports. Our passage through Hami obviously was too good an opportunity to miss. It was, of course, only a question of “squeeze.” But the difficulty was to offer the necessary bribe diplomatically, and it looked as if we might be stuck at Hami for a week.

But, though a doughty warrior, Chang, luckily for us, had a weak point—he was vain. Indeed, he was so flattered by the suggestion that Iacovleff should paint his portrait that he broke up an important meeting in order to pose. After studying the finished picture pensively, he appeared somewhat disappointed. He said that his eyes had been made too small, and asked for a mirror. But no matter how

much he raised his brows, his eyes remained narrow slits scarcely visible between rolls of fat. The portrait and his reflection in the mirror were alike. With a few deft touches, however, Iacovleff brought about a complete metamorphosis—the wide-open eyes sparkled with intelligence, and the face became handsome. Chang was delighted, and said that if a couple of decorations were painted on his breast and another star on his collar, he would certainly be promoted full General when he got back to Urumchi. On the same night he informed us that the confiscation of our passports was due to a misunderstanding ; and twenty-four hours later, on the sixth day of our stay, he sent a written permit for us to leave when we wished. His messenger at the same time brought Haardt a large equestrian photograph of the General, with the following dedication :

“ From the Conqueror of Hami, Chang,
To the Conqueror of the Pamirs, Haardt.”

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Although living in tents with the thermometer at 16° was far from agreeable, the week's delay at Hami did give us the opportunity of sizing up the military situation—so far as it affected us. We learned that the rebel chief, Mâ Chung-ying, had not been completely defeated, but had retreated with his Tungan troops into the neighbouring Province of Kansu and was occupying Tunhuang and Ansi, whence, so the rumour ran, he threatened to take Suchow. As his intentions towards the Expedition were pretty obvious, it seemed advisable to give him a wide berth—which meant avoiding Ansi and going across the desert. The objection to this was that having lost our reserve stock of petrol we had not enough for this four-hundred-mile journey.

The difficulty was solved by Petro and Audouin-Dubreuil. The former suggested that we should go to Hsing-hsing-hsia, where Ehr Wu,¹ six months earlier, had buried a thousand gallons of petrol and twenty cases of oil. This village had been completely destroyed, and presumably evacuated, by Mâ Chung-ying's troops. But if, on the other hand, they should still be there, any visitors would probably be received with machine guns.

Audouin-Dubreuil then volunteered to go and collect the petrol. His plan was for the Expedition to march on to a place about eighty miles from Hami, shewn on the maps as Ku-shui (Bitter Water), whence he would take a couple of lorries to Hsing-hsing-hsia, dig up the petrol and carry it back to Ku-shui the same day. The double trip would be only a hundred miles.

"But if you don't come back?" asked Haardt.

"I'll come back all right."

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On the 11th December we left Hami. The oasis on the outskirts of the city had been so knocked about that those of us who had seen the place five months earlier could hardly recognise it. The houses were now shapeless mounds, the irrigation-canals trenches filled with refuse, and of the former beautiful rows of poplars nothing remained but a tangle of stumps. Beyond this zone of death came a succession of half-ruined villages in which roamed packs of filthy, famished dogs. Through the gaping doorways we could see the deserted hearths and—already covered by a thick layer of dust—the humble household objects, such as cauldrons, clay pipes, old caftans, left behind by the panic-stricken inhabitants. Above the overgrown gardens, trampled crops, and grey fields of parched unharvested wheat the sky was black with crows, which, after circling in

¹ See page 155.

the air, would now and again settle in a mass like a huge funereal veil descending on the countryside.

About twenty miles out cultivation ended abruptly and gave place to the desert ; and by nightfall we came to Chang-liu-shui (Ever flowing water), a post on the road of the " Eight Eighteens."¹ The hamlet had been completely destroyed except for one house surrounded by a low earthen wall on which was crudely painted " Lo Cho-chang " (Camel-carts Inn). There being no answer to our knock, we pushed open the gate and entered. The place was deserted, and we prepared to spend the night there. On starting to set up his cot in one of the small rooms which surrounded the large courtyard like monastic cells, Specht saw a human being huddled up shivering in a corner. It was a very old Chinaman with a face furrowed by a million wrinkles. He paid no sort of attention to us, but kept muttering fearfully to himself, while hugging a diminutive Pekinese dog to his breast. What he was doing all alone in this desolate place was a mystery. Suddenly Ehr Wu recognised in this aged person the Leo Tao² from Hsing-hsing-hsia—the very man who had helped him to bury the petrol.

" That's lucky," said Audouin-Dubreuil. " As he also knows the hiding-place, we'll take him along with us."

But the old priest shook his head—to go to Hsing-hsing-hsia would not advance him a single step on the road to Perfection ! Nevertheless, after much eloquent pleading on the part of Ehr Wu, he finally agreed to accompany Audouin-Dubreuil's small advance party, which was to start ahead next morning on the search for petrol.

Extract from Audouin-Dubreuil's log-book. Ku-shui, Saturday, the 12th December, 1931 :

¹ According to Sir Aurel Stein it is to Chang-liu-shui that thirteen centuries ago the pious Chinese pilgrim Hsüang Ts'ang, dying from thirst and fatigue, was guided by a Bodhisattva whom he believed he saw in a dream.

² Taoist priest.

To

"It was so cold last night at Chang-liu-shui that I woke up at two in the morning, with the thermometer at 21° below zero, and when I touched my rifle the cold metal seared my ungloved hand. There was absolute silence in the ruined village. Round the fire outside a couple of Chinese boys were melting pieces of ice for coffee.

"When day dawned I climbed to the temple which dominates the village. Here broken idols surrounded me and seemed to follow my movements with their eyes. One had its stomach torn open. In the silence of this icy morning the pillaged temple seemed to suffer its desecration with calmness.

"In the courtyard of the inn the two lorries were being made ready for the journey to Hsing-hsing-hsia, where we were going to pick up petrol and oil to carry on to Suchow. The radiators were filled with boiling water and the engines warmed up with a blow-lamp.

"At 9.20 the lorries were ready and left the courtyard. In the first were Petro and myself, Gombo and the old priest, who swore that he remembered the spot where the petrol and oil were buried. In the second were Chauvet and Sivel.

"We were impatient to get away so as to reach our destination before dark, and avoid falling into a trap should the place happen to be occupied. But at the last moment the priest vanished. He reappeared later, carrying a bronze temple bell which he wished to take with him. We were anxious to oblige him, but such luggage was a trifle too cumbrous, and Petro advised him to hide it on the spot. He hesitated, insisted on taking the bell with him, then finally carried it to the well and threw it in. Petro and Gombo applauded this wise decision—the bell could not be in a better place, for it was to this spot that the Patron of the Pagoda, the

Dragon King of Waters, would come back. The bell had gone to meet him.

"At last the priest got into the lorry with his little dog, and we were soon in the desert, with all its charm of light and space. Now and then we passed through small clusters of ruined houses—ancient posting-stations destroyed by looters. But the only signs of life were the gazelles which fled at our approach.

"About eighty miles from Hami we drew up in the village of Ku-shui, where we deposited part of our load in order to be able to carry as much petrol as possible on our return journey. A few miserable refugees were living in the debris of this small village, which is a halt on the main road from Urumchi to the Yellow River. Here, also, everything was destroyed and looted, and on all sides, in the houses, and in the courtyards, were the traces of recent fighting—scraps of bloodstained uniform and clothing.

"We started off again at 2 p.m. After a dozen miles the going became more difficult—rocks and pockets of sand. Some distance in front of us a large wolf was loping along. By 4.30 the sun had sunk low, and we found ourselves in the mountains, where we frequently missed the trail whilst following up the valley towards the pass. Suddenly a wild horse crossed about two hundred yards ahead. Half an hour later, after a stiff climb, we were in the pass. Our lorries were tilted almost on end, and the beams of the headlights lit up the rocks above. If the place to which we were going had been occupied, we could not have advertised our approach better.

"As night fell and the western sky was barred by inky grey clouds, the pass looked more forbidding. Our headlights lit up ruined pagodas and at one place revealed an idol which had fallen from a gateway. To the east, although the ground was covered with snow, nothing

could be seen but a dark void. And in this void a mile or two ahead, lay the fortified post of Hsing-hsing-hsia and the little village of the same name. Guided by the priest, we covered rather more than a mile. Gombo, Mauser in hand, followed him into the village, whilst the rest of us, rifles at the ready, reconnoitred the wall near which we expected to find the buried petrol and oil.

"By now it was quite dark, and all round us was a curtain of black, broken only by the circles of the beams of our headlamps and the pale top of the mountain lit by the crescent moon. Gombo and the priest returned. They had seen nothing in the village, and the fortified post also appeared to be completely abandoned. So we set to work with pick and shovel at the spot pointed out by the priest, and dug for two hours, first removing the layer of frozen snow two feet thick over a space of some six square yards, and then attacking the soil.

"Suddenly, after wielding his pick with great energy for three hours, Chauvet gave a shout. He had struck something which gave out a metallic ring. We unearthed one tin of petrol, then another, then twenty. And after five hours' work we had also recovered the oil.

"Before starting to move the stuff, we tried to have a drink, but spirits were too cold to swallow ; and, though Chauvet succeeded in getting his teeth into a piece of frozen 'bully,' Petro, Sivel and I suffered from pains in the stomach. By now we were all feeling the effect of five hours' continuous exertion in a very low temperature. We loaded up all the oil and 75 tins of petrol.

"On the way back the priest informed us that he had left Szechwan twenty years earlier, at the bidding of the Abbé of his monastery, who had commanded him to travel West, always West, to live on charity, and to restore all the damaged shrines that he might find on his road. He now wished to go back to his Superior and

report what he had done during those twenty years, because it had become difficult to carry on his good work, as the shrines had been destroyed and the travellers, instead of giving alms, pillaged.

"At 3 a.m. our headlights showed up the devastated village of Ku-shui ; and I wondered if the rest of the Expedition had arrived. As we entered the enclosure of the caravanserai we heard the sound of engines ticking over. The little lamps were still alight. Two mechanics were on duty. Henceforward, owing to the cold, the engines were to be kept running without stop."

CHAPTER XVII

THE FROZEN HEART OF ASIA

Where the maps are blank—Suchow again—The mechanics' troubles
—New Year, 1932.

HAMI AND SUCHOW are connected by two roads which, on the map, roughly form an obtuse-angled triangle, of which the base is the camel-track which leads over the frontier pass at Min-shui,¹ while the two short sides enclose the obtuse angle at Ansi. These latter correspond to one of the sections of the Road of the Eight Eighteens.

Both routes had their drawbacks. We had not enough petrol to push on straight through the Gobi, and to travel via Ansi meant falling into the hands of Mâ Chung-ying. Fortunately, we were extricated from our dilemma on the 12th December, when Audouin-Dubreuil brought back to Ku-shui the petrol from Hsing-hsing-hsia. Haardt therefore decided to leave the Road of the Eight Eighteens at Ku-shui and strike northwards across country until we ran into the Hami-Suchow camel-track. Though this "furrow across the white of the map" was not more than fifty miles as the crow flies, there was the possibility that unforeseen difficulties might arise, for it ran through quite unknown country in the foot-hills of the Mongolian Plateau.

Of food and petrol we had plenty; water was our difficulty. Every one of our cans and five of our water-tanks

¹ See page 149.

had already been burst by the cold, and all that could be carried in the kitchen-car was 500 lbs. of ice, which was equivalent to less than ten quarts of water per head. In normal circumstances this would have been more than sufficient. But as we were setting forth into the unknown without a guide, and might wander for days before finding a well, we were taking a certain risk.

In point of fact, our faithful Gombo, looking like a clown in his purple robe and hat cocked on one side, was better than any guide, for he was endowed with a sixth sense which enabled him to find his way in desert country. Moreover, he had learned enough about motors to be able to judge of their performance on different kinds of ground, and could now be trusted to grease a car, clean a carburettor and even to regulate the valves. Nevertheless, all his acquired knowledge was not sufficient to eradicate from his mind the idea that a motor was a mysterious divinity.

"You quite understand how the piston travels in the cylinder?" Petro asked him.

"Yes."

"And how the petrol-gas is compressed and ignited by a spark as if by your flint?"

Gombo nodded. He understood all that, as well as the expansion of the gaseous mixture, which he compared to explosion of black powder. But what he could not understand was why the car should run.

That is why this man, who could work out logically from certain signs and peculiarities of the soil the configuration of a whole region far beyond the visible limits of the horizon, was constantly looking under the bonnet for the soul of the engine—the hidden god; and why, before setting out from Ku-shui, he burned a stick of incense and solemnly kow-towed three times as he tickled the carburettor. Such was this Asiatic on whom thirty Europeans were relying to take them through a region which he himself did not know.

Choosing a vague track leading northwards, he explained that it would probably lead to some small salt-pan or to one of those thickets of tamarisk known to the caravan leaders who have to collect salt and fuel. The track, no doubt, would die away, but he advised following it so long as it led in the right direction, for the very good reason that camels generally choose the best ground. In fact, we had gone barely ten miles when it did fade away, and we found ourselves in a country bewildering to people accustomed to great riverine systems, with tributary valleys governed by mountain ridges and lines of watersheds. In this region, which Chinese camel-drivers, called "Loan Shan,"¹ a valley frequently leads into one of the innumerable "punchbowls" or basins so common in the desert, from which it is impossible to find an exit. Gombo accordingly made us follow the line of crests ; and at six in the evening we reached a large rocky plateau. Here, though we had only gone twenty-five miles, we were forced to halt, as it was impossible to continue in the dark.

The task of looking after the cars in the long December nights with the temperature 20° below zero, and neither water nor fuel available, proved a difficult one. If the radiators were emptied, the water had to be used again, but by next morning it had turned to solid ice, which had to be melted. At such low temperatures as we were experiencing even boiling water froze when poured into a cold engine. The oil itself froze. Large fires had therefore to be kept going all night both to heat the water and to warm up the engines and oil-ducts from underneath. As all this called for wood, which was not abundant in the desert, we kept the engines ticking over.

This expedient was only a temporary one, because, even with the engines turning at no more than 600 r.p.m., after a few hours quantities of carbon formed in the cylinders, and

¹ This expression may be roughly translated as "disorderly mountains."

the sparking-plugs fouled and became choked with burned oil. Moreover, the extra consumption of petrol was serious at a time when uncertainty as to the distance to the next depot called for the strictest economy. And so, owing to the temperature, our scientific expedition developed into a sporting event—a race in which we had to keep going day and night to cover 250 to 350 miles at a stretch. But, in order to do this, we had first to find the track.

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On the 14th December the sun rose over an immense mineral kingdom, where the only signs of life were our own nine metal monsters crawling slowly over the barren gravel-strewn hills. Here we were continually forced by the steep ground to deviate west of our proper course to the north-east, and it was only late in the afternoon that Gombo discovered a gently sloping natural ramp which permitted us once more to move forward in the right direction. Shortly afterwards we came upon bones and dried camel-dung, which indicated previous traffic. While the cars stopped, Gombo went ahead to explore the trail and to find a bifurcation. In his own way he explained to us that we ought to go in the direction in which the acute angle made by the junction of two tracks pointed ; that in the desert the trails always radiated out from the wells ; and that if a well were behind, the trails diverged—if it were in front, they converged. As the region we were in was uninhabited, the well could only be on the road we were looking for.

At first we seemed to be heading in a wrong direction but, on rounding a clay cliff, the trail turned to the north, and at each subsequent bifurcation became more distinct. Towards the end of the day we were in a perfect network of parallel tracks, all running eastward, and nightfall brought us to the main Hami-Suchow camel-road.

The peculiar appearance of an important Mongolian camel-road is due to the fact that the caravans are composed of separate units, each of eight camels, and that whenever the nature of the ground permits, these units march in open formation, leaving many parallel trails. That is why in the Gobi the width of a road is always proportional to the amount of traffic. The great Kalgan-Urga road, for example, is in places as much as half-a-mile wide. That between Hami and Suchow was much less frequented and therefore narrower, but it, also, consisted of many parallel trails. Next day its resemblance to a railway became marked as we approached the Min-shui Pass, when all the trails converged into one in order to get through the Pass, which narrowed down to a width of 100 yards between outcrops of black shale powdered lightly with snow. Over the neck, where the ground was as flat and bare as a beach at low tide, the trails fanned out again like the lines in a railway shunting-yard.

Reymond complained that this part of the Gobi was dreary and uninteresting in winter. Father Teilhard protested, on the contrary, that it was a particularly promising field for prospecting, and one rich in prehistoric implements. On the bare wind-swept surface his trained eye could detect the smallest shaped stone, and he would stop the car, get out, and pick up first one, then another. At one spot he thought for a moment that he had discovered the site of an important settlement of the mid-paleolithic age, but further examination led him to the conclusion that the quartzite relics of mustertian appearance marked the southern limit of a less ancient stone-age civilisation brought south by a wave of humanity from Siberia.¹

"Mustertian or not," remarked Sauvage, "speaking cinegraphically, there is nothing doing. For the camera this part of the desert is worthless."

¹ See Appendix II.



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IN THE FROZEN HEART OF ASIA

"Look," cried Delastre, "a bird. Where is my gun?"

"Small wader; black head; lives in the sand; runs very fast," Reymond quoted instinctively. "Don't waste a cartridge."

For days this bird was the only living creature seen in the solitude and silence of the frozen heart of Asia. Sitting in the cars in one position for twenty hours out of twenty-four was a tiring business, and we suffered bitterly from the cold. Curiosity gave way to an irresistible drowsiness, from which it was difficult to arouse oneself. The mechanics, with burning eyes, struggled to keep awake. They drove continuously and did not get more than a couple of hours' sleep a night.

Meals were served twice a day in the open. Soup had to be drunk at once because, however hot it was when served, it froze rapidly in the metal bowls. We swallowed it greedily and in silence, standing round the kitchen-car, muffled up in furs which hampered our movements and made us cast grotesque shadows in the beams from the headlights. One night we halted for a few hours in order that Kervizic—who had succeeded in repairing his condenser—might try to communicate with the coast. But, a strong north-west wind prevented us setting up the mast. That night everyone was exhausted. Huddled together under the single tent, hurriedly pitched to protect us from squalls, we stood or squatted, hands blue with cold, and our faces gloomy and covered with dirt. "Who wants more noodles?" asked Gauffreteau wearily. Williams sighed without answering, and continued to file the dead skin off his chapped hands and to wind adhesive tape round his frost-bitten fingers. Specht waxed indignant as he looked at the thermometer, which registered 5° of frost. "How can it be only five degrees of frost? It has never been so cold!" He had not noticed that Pecqueur had just stirred his coffee with the thermometer. Left on the

table, the mercury sank lower and lower until it reached 33° below zero.

Haardt, who was an example of patience and calmness to us all, now resolved to cover the last hundred miles to Suchow without a stop. And, fortified with spirits and hot coffee, we continued the march.

On the 18th December, at three o'clock in the morning, the column came to a halt, and for the first time in six days we saw some human beings. Whether they were soldiers, peasants or vagabonds it was not possible to say. "Where is Mâ Chung-ying?" asked Li. "Not at Suchow," was the reply. As this meant that the road was free for us, we at once started again; and, like ships that pass in the night, the strangers vanished again into the darkness. Day broke over a sad, blurred, countryside where the sight of the first village wrung our hearts. Although life seemed to be completely disorganised by the cold, children were swarming everywhere, their bodies covered with miserable rags and their legs absolutely naked and black with dirt.

At noon we came to a city, but its gates closed at our approach, and we were admitted only after an hour's parleying. At last we had reached Suchow, and we looked forward joyfully to sleeping under a roof. Awaiting us at our bivouac we found cases of supplies, and the following message for Haardt:

"Conveyed three sedan cars and the wireless-plant addressed to the Governor of Sinkiang as far as Ansi, where I waited three months without news from you. Then the city was taken by Mâ Chung-ying, who immediately confiscated the wireless-plant but offered to return it in exchange for twenty machine guns and a million rounds of ammunition. Have escaped from Ansi

with the cars and come here, where the colonel commanding the local garrison expects Mâ Chung-ying any moment. As a matter of precaution have left here for you only enough petrol to take you 60 miles. The remainder is distributed at 60-mile intervals along the road to Liangchow, where I await you. Grichkoff.”¹

The loss of this wireless equipment, which with the cost of carriage was worth much more than half a million francs, was serious enough, but not so serious as the loss of the petrol would have been. If the stock now at Suchow had been confiscated, it would have necessitated a fresh shipment by caravan from Peking, which would have taken at least four months to arrive. Haardt, therefore, had reason to congratulate himself on having avoided Ansi. Suchow, from which city the China Group had had so much difficulty in getting away, provided for us on the return journey a further opportunity for meeting the local authorities at close quarters. No one was surprised to learn that our passports were once more declared null and void and that a price was set on our departure.

“As the officer commanding the local garrison is only a colonel,” remarked Haardt, “we may expect to leave in four or five days’ time. I am beginning to learn a tariff—a month’s delay for a marshal, ten days for a general and not more than five, I hope, for a mere colonel.” Before long he confessed that he preferred doing business with the Sinkiang officials, who were mandarins of the old school, to dealing with the “militarists,” the ruling class of New China. Li shared his opinion. “It’s unfortunate,” he said, “that such a rich and important place as Suchow should be governed by a coolie who can scarcely sign his own name !”

¹ M. N. Grichkoff of Peking was conveying to Urumchi the equipment (three cars and three wireless-plants) destined for the Governor-General of Sinkiang. It was now clear why this material had never reached its destination. See page 188.

This city, one of the oldest and most thriving in Kansu, was inhabited entirely by soldiers.¹ They were not defending it against a foreign invader but against soldiers of their own race who threatened to occupy it in order to live there in their turn at the expense of honest farmers and merchants. Most of China's misfortunes were due to this arrogant and useless soldiery, fed and maintained by chiefs who were ruthlessly ruining the country by too heavy a burden of arbitrary taxation. In Kansu this state of affairs dated from the rule of Fêng Yu-hsiang, the so-called "Christian General." Before that the Province had been governed by civil officials appointed only after competitive examination by special nominating boards. Although their conduct was not always beyond reproach, they had a certain respect for the law and for the rights of the individual, so that the people could, and did, live in content.

But when in 1924-25 the Christian General, the self-styled Liberator of China, was driven from the coast by Marshal Chang Tso-lin and established himself in Kansu, in order, with the aid of the Soviets, to reorganise his army, he speedily ruined the Province. He paralysed trade by imposing prohibitive transit-duties, impoverished the population by collecting land-taxes for years in advance, and not infrequently deprived the peasants of their last bag of grain. All this was done in the name of the three immortal principles of Sun Yat-sen, quotations from whose famous testament were painted in large characters on the houses and walls of towns and villages, and were even exhibited along the roads. In 1929 Fêng Yu-hsiang was defeated by the Nanking Government, and Kansu fell into the hands of the Mâ clan. The former family affection of its members was now rapidly transformed into a mutual rivalry which completed the ruin of the Province.

General Mâ Pu-fang—the man with whom Point had

¹ See page 139.

had to deal seven months earlier—was no longer in Suchow. It was another Mâ, a colonel, who was occupying the city with other troops ; but he was expected soon to cede the place to a third Mâ—our old friend Mâ Chung-ying. This colonel proved to be a simple, unpretentious soul. He was easily satisfied with a pair of prism field-glasses and two drums of cup-grease,¹ and ordered our passports to be returned to us at once. Unfortunately, however, he made the mistake of allowing all our documents to fall into the hands of a Mr. Su.

On the morning of the 21st December Mr. Su came to call on us, and, introducing himself as the President of the Tang-pu (local cell of the Kuomintang or “ People’s Party ”), made such outrageous demands that the argument lasted all day and well into the night. And when Haardt, who had not been present, entered the room at eleven o’clock, he found everyone much heated by the endless discussion. His appearance had a calming effect.

“ Just ask Mr. Su whether the passports issued by the Nanking Government are, or are not, valid here ? ”

As Mr. Su was the representative at Suchow of the Nanking Kuomintang, he had no choice but to answer in the affirmative.

“ Ask him if he realises that China is now passing through a critical period when she may need the help of foreigners, and tell him that he seems at the moment to be acting against the interests of his country.” These words were spoken in a most friendly tone.

Again the reply was in the affirmative, and Haardt left the room. The delegate of the People’s Party calmed down :

“ We need a few rifles.”

“ You shall have two.”

¹ A gift much appreciated by officers in remote parts of China, where it is generally impossible to procure proper lubricants for greasing fire-arms.

"Also two revolvers and two Mauser pistols, with ammunition."

"In exchange for the passports?"

There was a pause. At midnight Mr. Su suddenly made up his mind: "All right. I will give you your passports in exchange for the arms. You can leave to-morrow."

Everyone heaved a sigh of relief and thankfully went off to bed. But our rest was soon broken, for a couple of hours later there was a violent knocking, and soldiers demanded admittance. Suspicious at Mr. Su's long absence, they accused us of having kidnapped him. They finally discovered him playing mahjong with our two Chinese interpreters. He was in high good humour, having just won forty dollars. The boys as a matter of fact, had been ordered to lose to him.¹

On the morning of our departure it was suggested that Hackin should call on Mr. Chang, an ex-judge and scholar of high repute, and a great art connoisseur. He was received in a study filled with books and scrolls, where he found Mr. Chang painting delicate-coloured gold fish and butterflies on a fan.

"I should very much like to have your opinion on this bronze mirror," said his host. "Is it not a beautiful example of the Han period?"²

"It is a marvellous piece," answered Hackin, replacing the mirror on the table, "but it is later than the Han Dynasty."

"What makes you think so?"

"The vine motif. You know, of course, that vines were introduced into China only during the T'ang Dynasty."³

The mandarin smiled. "You're right. I was presuming

¹ When a Chinaman desires to offer a "squeeze" or tip to an important official in a graceful and discreet way, he arranges a game of mahjong, and lets his adversary win the amount he intends to give. If the official says, "Let's play one more round," it means that the squeeze is not sufficient.

² Han Dynasty—206 B.C.—A.D. 220.

³ T'ang Dynasty—A.D. 618—A.D. 907.

to test your knowledge ; and I must admit that it is profound. Would you like to see some pottery ? I have some remarkable specimens."

And for two hours the French archæologist and the Chinese scholar discussed the masterpieces of China's glorious past, admiring many dust-covered treasures which the old mandarin showed only to connoisseurs capable of appreciating their beauty. As Hackin was about to leave, Mr. Chang stopped him : " One moment. You have not seen my rarest possession—a magnificent bronze incense-burner of the Chou Dynasty. I will let you have it for two hundred dollars. It is a unique object with which I should never part were we not living in a time when a commander of a mere hundred soldiers is more respected than a man of learning and talent. Fifteen years ago I resigned my official post to avoid having any dealings with the riff-raff of which our ruling class is now composed."

Hackin took the incense-burner and, without looking at it, paid the money. " Mr. Chang is a gentleman worthy of all respect," he announced when he returned, looking lovingly at his latest acquisition. Then, examining it more closely under a magnifying-glass, he added, " And damned clever at that ! " and put down the fake !

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Our dealings with the Chinese were not of a nature to increase our confidence ; and we all now preferred the strain of long marches in the desert, and the consequent lack of sleep, to the relative luxury of billets where one could eat and rest comfortably. But in this prolonged " race " our success depended on the continued efficiency of our cars. And this it was not possible to ensure. They could neither be tended nor repaired adequately after the tremendous strain to which they had been subjected for so many months. Since the caravan of spares on which

we had counted had been looted by Mâ Chung-ying, many essential parts were lacking, and the engines showed signs of fatigue. Then began difficult days for the mechanics, who carried on with their job, however, without complaining.

On the 22nd December, when we were sixty miles east of Suchow, the engine of Remillier's car developed serious trouble and had to be completely dismantled.

The work, which in a well-organised garage might have taken a week, was actually done in eight hours. Although we all volunteered to help, there were too many of us to be of any use, and only three mechanics assisted Remillier. To take out a cotter-pin or some other such small part meant working with bare hands ; but in a temperature of 23° below zero almost as soon as gloves were pulled off they had to be put on again. The four men hung over the engine with infinite patience and imperturbable good humour—as if it were a sick child. Balourdet treated it with fatherly kindness. Nothing could resist Piat's steady strength. Maurice never lost his temper, and Remillier cheered himself up with the sound of his own voice. At dawn, when the sun rose in a sky gay with soft tints, the faces of the men were colourless, and their cheeks, drawn with cold and fatigue, had a dull metallic sheen. But the engine was repaired and we were able to proceed.

About thirty miles beyond Kanchow, one of the track-bands was cut in two. Then, ten minutes after it had been patched up, a lorry skidded in the sand and sheered the bolts of a rear wheel as cleanly as if they had been filed. In order not to tempt our luck any further we spent the night where we were.

On the 26th December, after a start at four in the morning, engine trouble similar to that already experienced forced us to halt, and it took six hours to rectify it. Forty miles farther on a track-band was found to be worn out and

useless. It could not be patched up and had to be replaced. This meant unscrewing 180 bolts and changing sixty rubber shoes, sixty metal soles, sixty *talons* and 120 rubber teeth. The temperature was 28° below zero, and the whole convoy was blocked in a deep sunken road. Even the most optimistic began to feel discouraged.

We were still 130 miles from Liangchow, where there was an important Catholic Mission, and Haardt would have liked to make up for lost time by travelling day and night, but no one had slept for three days, and the mechanics were at the end of their tether. The question was whether they could hold out for eighteen hours longer. They did, and by 6 p.m. on the 28th we were within twelve miles of the town. Unfortunately, this last short stretch of road was intersected by numerous rivers fed by warm springs and therefore incompletely frozen. As the cars crashed through the thin crust of ice, the water got into the brake-linings, and then again froze and so blocked the front wheels, which had to be thawed with blow-torches. It took us eight hours to cover these last twelve miles, and it was not until two in the morning that we heard the sound of friendly voices.

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On New Year's Day, 1932, in the great refectory, the Fathers of the *Göttliche Wort* and the members of the Expedition were gathered round the long table for the evening meal. In one corner of the room stood a small Christmas tree glittering with candles, which Dielman had decorated with strange toys—piston-rings, steel roller bearings, and valve-springs. When the meal was over, Father Provincial, a German like the rest of these good Fathers, lit his pipe and stood up.

“There are thirty of you,” he said, addressing us, “but had you been fifty, we would gladly have made room for all. Gentlemen, you are French, and we are German . . .

and we have fought against each other. But over here we can look at things in better perspective. Gathered round the same table so far away from our two countries—which we love equally—we can regard them as two parts of a world greater than either. We can forget old troubles and exchange mutual good wishes.”

When he had finished his little speech, Reymond the naturalist and sceptic, recalling with an effort all the German he had learned at school, began to sing—without any art, but perhaps all the more convincingly :

“ *Ich hat’ einen Kamerad . . .* ”

Their eyes lowered, the members of the Expedition listened to him thus replying for them all. Then Father Volpert, the Dean of the Missionaries, who had already been in Central Asia forty years and would certainly die at his post, raised his glass and said :

“ To your success, fellow Europeans.”

CHAPTER XVIII

CHRISTIAN OASES

In a monastery—First news from the outer world—Poverty in Kansu
—Along the Yellow River—The Abbey of San-tao-ho.

EVERY MORNING the chapel bell summoned us to the refectory, where Father Provincial said Grace, and each man crossed himself and took his place at table. It would have been difficult to find a gathering of individuals more dissimilar than the fifty assembled there. But the very differences in nationality and language, ambitions, opinions, and knowledge of the world, which logically should have kept them apart, had, on the contrary, drawn them closer together.

Father Volpert, who had rarely seen a motor-car, was greatly interested to hear about their manufacture, and, stroking his long white beard, he listened attentively to a description of "chain production" as carried out at the Citroën factory in Paris. While some of us were told how Chinese students in Catholic seminaries prepared for their theological examinations, and learned with surprise that the school children used a brush for writing Latin and a steel pen only for the multiplication tables, Morizet astounded the younger missionaries with his stories of life in the "movie world." During the day we busied ourselves with our own affairs, and after supper lit our lamps and retired early to our cells. After the strain of the last few weeks the calm and rest were a godsend. We shaved each

morning, were clean and well-fed, and thoroughly enjoyed the regularity of monastic discipline.

Nothing was missing from the stock of spare parts awaiting us, and in a few days all our equipment had been completely overhauled. Kervizic discovered two extra condensers, repaired the wireless, and at once got into communication with the French Legation at Peking, which sent us best wishes and congratulations on our "resurrection." But the news we received was not good hearing. The world financial crisis had become chronic. The Japanese had invaded Manchuria and bombarded Shanghai. And in France taxation had been increased. After months of silence these first echoes from outside caused us to look back more kindly on our sojourn at Urumchi and its happy ignorance.

On the 7th January we set out from Liangchow in fine fettle, though we said good-bye with regret to the kind Fathers, who pressed us to prolong our stay. Our road, which now led across a *loess*¹ country, must have been at least two thousand years old. It was possible to reconstruct its history: once, in the dim past, a cart must have meandered along and left two ruts in the virgin soil. This was followed by other carts—millions of others. Trampled by hoofs and churned up by wheels, the soil was continually being pulverised into a fine dust, which was as continually carried away by the prevailing wind. Each year the ruts became a few inches deeper, and with time the road developed into a trench, then a cutting, then a gorge between vertical walls—in some places over two hundred feet deep.

As the width of this sunken road was not greater than that of the standard Chinese carts, which were narrower than our cars, it would have been risky for us to venture on it. Fortunately there was also what the people of Kansu

¹ Half sand and half powdered clay.

proudly called "a motor road," which had been built five years before by Feng Yu Hsian, one of whose good deeds we were now in a position to appreciate. But it had never been kept in repair, and, with its tree-stumps, silted-up ditches, washed-out bridges and culverts, it testified only to the failure of an ambitious dream. However, since a car could be driven along it without the aid of pick and shovel, we had to admit that it merited the title of "national highway."

Between the fortified villages and farms, with which the countryside was dotted, our journey was uneventful. But whenever we arrived outside a walled town our anxiety as to the reception we should meet was renewed by the sight of the heads of bandits nailed by the ears to the heavy gates. Actually, we met nothing worse than Kansu peasants sitting huddled on their doorsteps, warming their hands under their sheepskin coats as they stared at us from under their long dusty hair. They were pitiful creatures, with earth-blackened faces, gaping mouths and running eyes and noses. Even their smiles were indicative more of distrust and apprehension than of joyousness. The astonishing thing was to find so many children in a land where there was no means of supporting them.¹ They looked at us from a respectful distance, wise and sad as old people, and always subdued, except once, when Williams gave them a tin of jam. This nearly provoked a riot until an adult intervened, seized the tin, dipped his finger into the jam and let each youngster have a suck in turn.

These poor uprooted folk were hungry, but they did not complain. They said that the harvest had been moderately good—a statement which made us wonder what a real famine would be like. They were cold, too. Having for centuries deforested a land where coal frequently outcrops

¹ In Kansu the mortality of children under a year old is forty per cent.

on the surface, though they were unable to mine any, they scraped up from the naked mountains the little fuel that still grew, often walking for half a day, their backs bent under a heavy bundle of firewood, in order to bring home enough to keep the family warm for a few hours. At night adults and children, herded together in one room, awaited sleep in an icy atmosphere heavy with sickly sweet fumes. After herself having smoked several pipes, the grandmother would roll a little ball of opium in her fingers, roast it over a small lamp and then hand the bamboo pipe to her daughter, who, after inhaling deeply, would blow some of the acrid smoke into the mouth of her new-born babe. And so life would be sustained until the rays of the sun again brought warmth.

All along the National Highway the misery was stark and overwhelming. The very appearance of the countryside was an expression of it : two furrows of yellow earth separated by pools of half frozen slush ; here, to one side, a dead elm ; near by, a starved bird ; there an old pagoda, with prettily painted but crumbling walls and tumble-down roof. Tree, bird, temple—all ruins—Ichabod !

By the irony of Fate, opium, famine, bandits and Muhammadan rebellions were all that the Great Wall had now to protect—the Great Wall—that frowning rampart of masonry and earth, with battlements, bastions and watch-towers, which we had followed since Suchow. Formerly it had acted as the bulwark of a civilised world against the barbarians from the wastes of the Great North. According to the Chinese, who still believe it to be true, “ No men live beyond the Wall, only Mongols.” Nevertheless, we preferred the solitude and the society of the Mongols to the teeming suffering humanity of the cities. And when we left the National Highway to take a short cut to the Yellow

River we felt happier as soon as we reached the wilderness of the Alashan Desert beyond the Wall.

It was not long before the famous Tangheri dunes showed up on the horizon. They form the southern end of the great belt of sand crossing the Gobi desert diagonally from north to south, over which the China Group had passed eight months earlier, at Hoyer Yamatu. Two days later, leaving the sands behind us,¹ we came in sight of the majestic Yellow River covered with blocks of ice.

During the long, tedious hours of travel, as we watched the scenery through the mica windows of the felt-lined cars, our thoughts often turned homewards. Never before had we so much appreciated the subtle charm of France. It was exactly a year—Piat suddenly remembered—since he had been fined for scorching on the road to Fontainebleau, and the recollection made him feel sentimental. For the time being our curiosity was satisfied, and our fancy turned naturally and more pleasantly to the France of the past than to the China of the present—so vast, so drab, so monotonous. All the monuments, bridges, temples, shops, tombs, villages and farms which during our thousand-mile journey had at first seemed so varied, in retrospect now appeared alike, as did the city walls, fortified gates and governors' palaces, with their inevitable stone screens protecting the entrances from evil spirits.

We hoped to find at Ningsia fresh and more striking evidence of Chinese civilisation. But we were disappointed. Uniformity was the very fruit of a theory of life which, in imposing a taboo of rigid tradition on every activity, entirely repressed the genius of the individual. For, though the Americans may claim to have been responsible for what is called "standardisation," it has, in fact, existed in China

¹ The cold and the wind were for the first time of help to us. The slight moisture contained in the sand froze into a crust over which even our lorries could pass without difficulty. Moreover, as the prevailing winds were easterly, the western slopes of the dunes were not very steep.

for centuries. Indeed, there it has been far more rigid than in the West, where the desire for perfection has always animated the spirit of research. In China perfection has been attained, and this spirit is dead.

What, for example, is the use of torturing the brain in efforts to improve the design of a cart-wheel? Has it not from time immemorial given complete satisfaction? So why try to change something that is perfect? Why seek to establish new principles in the domain of architecture? The curve of this roof—so natural and graceful; the proportions of this temple; the plan of that courtyard; the shape of that lotus-flower, carved in stone by the hand of a master so that its very soul seems to live; are they not all the ultimate expression of beauty and symmetry?

For these reasons Ningsia, where we arrived on the 13th January, appeared to us exactly like every other Chinese city. As in Suchow, Kanchow and Liangchow, there was the same quadrilateral city wall pierced by four gates surmounted by triple-roofed pavilions; the same arrangement of streets intersecting at right angles; the same grey tiles on the roofs; the same crowds loitering in front of the same shops; the same smells; the same setting. A two hours' walk satisfied our curiosity. The only new things to be seen were a few bicycles, displays of thermos flasks and electric torches, and on the bookstalls some Japanese chromographs of female bathers in kimonos stepping gaily into enamelled baths—vague influences from beyond the sea.

Here our first real surprise was the nature of the reception given to us by the authorities. It did not occur to anyone to confiscate our passports! We could come and go at will, and work as we pleased. The soldiers who mounted guard at our door were stationed there merely to protect us from the prying curiosity of the crowds. And it was a new experience to receive presents instead of giving them. Four

coats of sky-blue silk lined with snow-white Alashan lamb were brought to us on our arrival by the Chief of Police, who called to welcome us.

We were still more surprised that the mandarins—whom we had hitherto always seen in long silken robes—were wearing what they called “Chung Shan-yi”—Sun Yat-sen’s costume.¹ It consisted of a pair of dark-blue trousers and a jacket cut in European style, with a straight collar and five buttons down the front. This, we were told, was a preliminary step towards the economic emancipation of the country. The argument was that the old-fashioned Chinese robe was very long and required twice as much material as was necessary for a short jacket. Since the saving in material on one garment was two square yards and the price of cotton approximately a silver dollar a yard, China, thanks to Dr. Sun Yat-sen, could save as much as eight hundred million silver dollars a year—money which would otherwise go into the pockets of British and Japanese merchants. This explanation betrayed the influence of the Kuomintang, that highly nationalist and anti-foreign party which for a whole year had been the source of all our troubles, and which, by a violent Press campaign, had almost prevented the passage of the Expedition through China.

Our third surprise came when the Kuomintang organised an official banquet in our honour. It was given in the *Chung Shan Ting*, the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall. Above the entrance to the hall hung a large board inscribed with four gilt characters : “Tien Hsia Wei Kung”—“We are all lords of the earth,” and at the end of it was an altar, gaily decorated with flags and pennants, on which stood a large portrait of Dr. Sun Yat-sen. The food, served at a long table covered by a clean cotton cloth, was European. “Only two nations in the world—the French and the Chinese—have acquired the true art of eating,” said

¹ Sun Yat-sen is generally called in China Sun Chung-shan.

General Mâ¹ politely, making noble efforts to swallow dishes which represented the Chinese conception of French cooking, but which made us long for the sea-slugs and tinned birds' nests of our first Chinese meal at Tash-kurghan. Towards the end of the feast Mr. Shên, the Delegate of the Central Kuomintang, stood up and proposed a toast :

" Gentlemen. Although our country wishes only to live at peace with her neighbours, she has been attacked by an unscrupulous and imperialistic nation. But Justice is not dead. And when without the slightest provocation the Japanese invaded Manchuria, one of the most eminent statesmen of your honourable country, the President of the League of Nations, whose words are respected by the whole world, did not hesitate to defend our cause. I drink to the health of Mr. Pu Li-an ! "

" Whom is he talking about ? "

" Briand."

We had been without newspapers for so long that we did not know exactly what was happening in Manchuria. Audouin-Dubreuil asked for some details : " Does it mean that you are fighting the Japanese ? "

Mr. Shên replied that that was out of the question for two reasons. First, because the Chinese were a highly civilised and inherently peace-loving people who believed that international disputes should in the present enlightened times be settled by the moral forces of justice and equity and not by the brutalities of war. And, secondly, because the Japanese were much stronger than the Chinese. On being asked the purpose of the many soldiers to be seen on every side, he said that they were to maintain order and protect the population against bandits.

At the end of the banquet General Mâ referred to the subject of the bandits—who, in his opinion, were far more

¹ This was another Mâ—a learned and refined gentleman of the old school.



Ph. M. O. Williams, copyright N.G.S.

THE YELLOW RIVER

warlike than the soldiers. He warned us that they were particularly dangerous on the Paotow road, which we were proposing to follow, and advised us to be on our guard and to be careful not to be bluffed by these people, who generally wore military uniforms—a practice which resulted in much confusion. His final words were :

“ What I mean is—do not talk when you ought to shoot ; and do not shoot when you ought to talk. One of my secretaries will escort you to Paotow. He is very experienced in matters of this sort.”

.

That same evening we gathered for tea in Father Van Dyck's little room at the Catholic Mission. It was filled with books, water-colours and photographs.

“ You were not very talkative during the banquet, Father,” said Haardt.

“ Well, you see,” replied Father Van Dyck philosophically, “ it used to be a pleasure to exchange ideas with the Chinese, but now when I meet an old friend like General Mâ we do not talk. We simply sit and look at each other in silence. He is an old Chinaman and I am almost one, for I have spent thirty years of my life here. How, in the circumstances, can either of us believe what the other says ? ”

He told us that in his spare time he painted Biblical saints dressed in mandarin coats, or Virgins in Chinese satin slippers, to give to his converts. His greatest pleasure, however, was to play Handel on his violin, accompanied by his colleague, the Protestant missionary, at the harmonium, because then they both forgot that they were in China.

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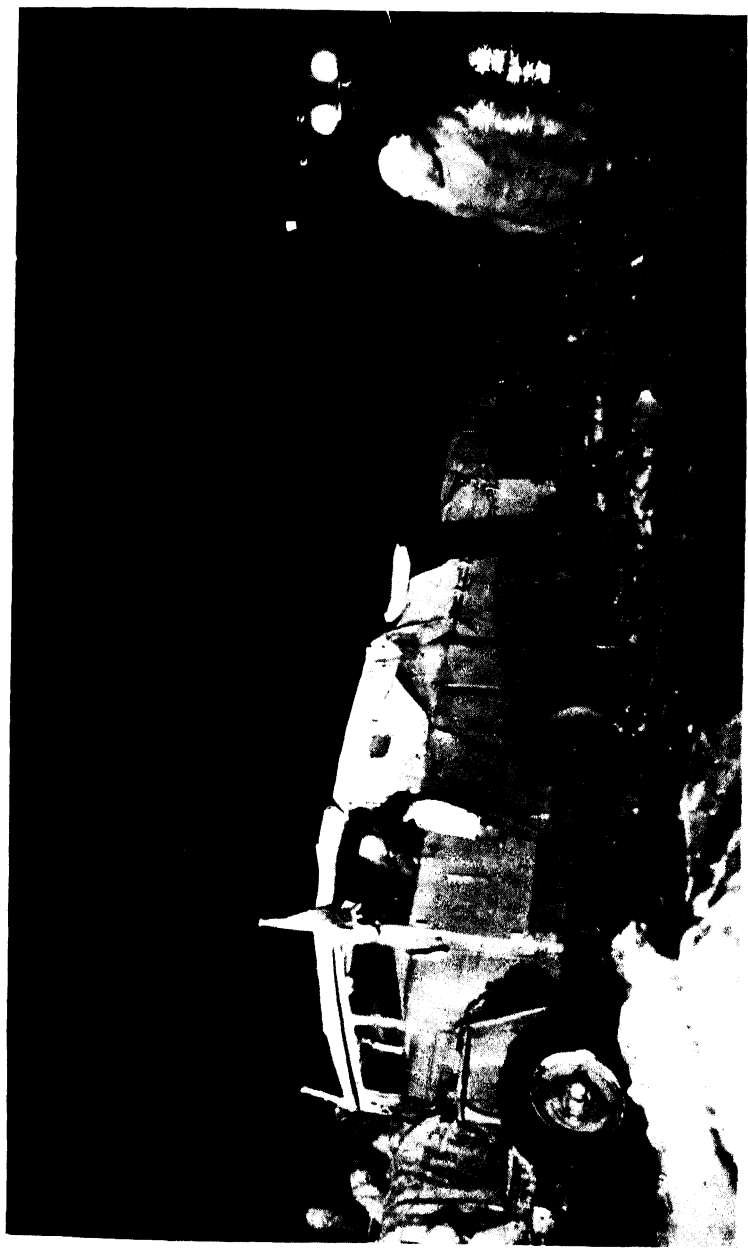
Father Van Dyck belonged to the Belgian Order of Scheutists, the headquarters of which was on our route, two hundred miles north of Ningsia, at the great bend of the

Yellow River.¹ After leaving Suchow, we passed through a series of Christian Oases, at each of which we were received with open arms, just as soldiers returning from a patrol are welcomed by the outposts. Indeed, all these German and Belgian Fathers treated us as fellow-Europeans. It was astonishing to come upon this "Latin atmosphere" in a region so far away as that lying between Mongolia and Tibet. But it has existed there ever since the eighteenth century, when the Jesuits succeeded in gaining great influence at the court of the Emperor Ch'ien Lung. At that time the members of this learned Order were the chief spiritual ambassadors of Europe to Asia. And these powerful Lords of the Church had engaged in the construction of vast works in this part of China, of which we could still see the traces. Near Chungweis they had built great masonry locks and weirs to divert the waters of the Yellow River, and had converted many hundreds of square miles of sterile land at the edge of the Alashan Desert into a rich garden.

Such was the subject of our conversation at two in the morning of the 20th January. We had left Ningsia the previous afternoon and had been on the march for eleven hours. Suddenly the convoy stopped. Outside, Chauvet's voice was heard calling for everyone to help.

Audouin-Dubreuil's car, the "Silver Crescent," had met with a serious accident. While crossing one of the irrigation canals it had crashed through the apparently solid ice and was submerged up to the top of the radiator. Audouin-Dubreuil, Williams, Pecqueur and Gauthier had luckily managed to scramble out through the roof, taking with them everything they could snatch up. In trying to haul the water-logged car out, Remillier had broken the two front springs and the crank-casing of his own car. This

¹ The Scheutist Missions were founded some fifty years ago by the Belgian Father Verbist along the bend of the Yellow River between Paotas and Ningsia.



THE ACCIDENT TO THE "SILVER CRESCENT"

Ph. Moritz, copyright E.C.C.A.

scene of confusion was lit up by the headlights of the "Silver Crescent," which continued to shine uncannily under water as the car slowly settled down. Without hesitating, Remillier and Chauvet waded up to their waists in the icy stream and made two cables fast to her hooks. Penaud then took command of the operations, which began by breaking the surrounding ice with crowbars. Williams cried out for his plates to be saved. They were in the trailer. But the trailer was also waterlogged and the plates had to be left to their fate. The main thing was to rescue the car before she was frozen in. Cables were made fast to three other cars on the bank, and after several unsuccessful attempts she and her trailer, smothered in mud and encased in a layer of ice, were towed out to the opposite side. By a marvellous stroke of luck Williams' gear had not been damaged, and so a superb and unique collection of photographs was preserved.

This accident caused a delay of thirteen hours, of which at least six were spent in enforced idleness while we waited for daylight. Tired and disheartened, we spent the rest of the night either sitting in the cars or lying on the ground near the engines. Only Gombo, wrapped in his violet sheepskin coat, slept peacefully, in true Mongol fashion, on the frozen soil.

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At sunset we continued our course along the left bank of the Yellow River and entered an immense prairie of tall reeds swaying in the strong wind. On the opposite bank a high stone crag, called "Gengis Khan's Anvil," was outlined against the flaming sky above the low reddish cliffs of the Ordos. Beautiful and majestic as was the scenery, its grandeur had lost the power to impress us, for in these last difficult weeks nothing but time had counted.

The insecurity of travel, the misery of the people, the

exactions of the soldiery, the walled towns vainly striving to protect themselves against massacre and loot, and the grim ramparts of the fortified Abbey of St. James (San Chen Koung) in San-tao-ho, which suddenly showed up in the light of the moon, were all suggestive of the Middle Ages. The Abbey, the seat of a Catholic Bishop, was a city of refuge. It formed a square, with sides five hundred yards long, and was surrounded by a high wall and a loopholed parapet, from the look-out posts of which the country could be seen for miles in every direction. It was in this fort, with its primitive bastions, curtains, ramps, and watch-towers that twelve Belgian Fathers, dauntless warrior-monks, had for forty years sheltered a Chinese Christian community, their only weapons being arquebuses and old flint-lock rifles.

They told us that they had our stock of supplies safely stored. But they had not received the seven cases of track-bands which, together with some loose parts, had been sent from Tientsin the previous year. Father Labane thought that some brigand chief might have seized them. After asking if we had not been warned that the road to Paotow was unsafe, he told us that we had nothing to fear as far as Wu Yuen, which was half-way to Paotow, for the road was in Wang Ying's territory. Wang Ying, a former bandit leader, at the moment commanding ten thousand men, was very anxious to be graded in the regular army, and was therefore unlikely to attack us. But after Wu Yuen we should have to keep our eyes and ears open. Between Wu Yuen and Paotow there were three roads. We would have to enquire and then choose carefully. It was largely a matter of intuition. But if the bandits were on all three roads, they could not be very strong on any one, and our chance on each would be equal.

The track-bands, Father de Wilde thought, might have been taken by General Su, who also was an ex-bandit, but,

being a regular, had not the same motive as Wang Ying to refrain from robbery. He knew that the Expedition was expected sooner or later to pass through his territory, and no doubt hoped to obtain a large ransom for the bands—which he believed were essential to it.

“He’s wrong,” said Haardt. “We can get along without them.”

At 4 a.m. on the 24th, after a stirrup-cup of locally distilled spirit, we got into the cars and took a last look at these twelve Belgians, whom we should never see again, and who would die at their post without revisiting their native land.

Monseigneur Schoote shook hands once more :

“We are too poor to offer you a material souvenir of your stay at San-tao-ho, but we shall say a Mass for your success.”

CHAPTER XIX

SAN PU KUAN

Bandits—The Expedition is attacked at Patsebolong—Arrival at Paotow, the railway terminus.

DAYBREAK ON THE 26TH was ushered in by a strong following wind ; and thick clouds of fine yellow dust invaded the cabins, filling our nostrils, gritting between our teeth, and obscuring the wind-screens as with a film. By ten o'clock visibility was so bad that we could see nothing ahead of the radiator-caps, and had to proceed slowly, feeling our way, for fear of falling into some hole.

We were 220 miles from Paotow, in a strip of fertile land on the left bank of the Yellow River. It was not so very long since this territory, wedged between two deserts—the Alashan to the west and the Ordos to the east—had been the domain of Mongol princes, but it was now inhabited only by Chinese settlers from the neighbouring over-populated provinces of Shansi and Kansu, who had penetrated little by little and peacefully but tenaciously pushed the Mongols farther into the desert. Following on the settlers had come the mandarins. They had begun cautiously to assume the administrative control of this area, linking it to the new provinces of Suiyuan (formerly the northern part of Shansi Province) and Ningsia (formerly the northern part of Kansu Province). But, as the two provincial Governments had not yet (January, 1932)



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THE RAMPARTS OF THE FORTIFIED MONASTERY OF SAN CHENG KOUNG

entered into "geographical contact," and the Mongol Prince of Alashan had withdrawn to the west, a part of this region had not fallen under any of these three jurisdictions, and was known as the *San Pu Kuan*,¹ which might be translated freely as the "Three Don't Cares." Situated on the Yellow River, which is an important trade-route from Koko Nor and Tibet to the China coast, this "free territory" was a happy hunting ground for bandits.

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"Beware of bandits!"

How often had this warning been drummed into us since we had entered China. To receive such advice in regard to an adventurous race like the Arabs, amongst whom the presence of freebooters was to be expected, would not have been so surprising as it was in regard to the Chinese, who—as we observed on our journey—were a sedentary and industrious people, whose only ambitions seemed to be, in the towns to trade peacefully, and in the country to cultivate the land without harming their neighbours. And if it be remembered that Chinese civilisation was based on the patriarchal system in which the Emperor was father of all his subjects, the Governor of a Province father of all those below him, and the head of a family absolute master of his household, it is easy to understand why the Chinese as a whole are inherently amenable to established authority and order and respectful of tradition. But should some cataclysm or calamity of any kind befall, such as famine, war or flood, which tears these honest folk from the bosom of their families and forces them to abandon their houses, land and material possessions, they lose all the tangible symbols of the positivist doctrine in which they have been brought up and have faith. The rules which have always governed their existence having suddenly ceased to be

¹ San = three, Pu = not, Kuan = to administer, or care for.

operative, they find themselves quite incapable of developing new principles of individual morality, which might help to establish some other form of stable existence. Once uprooted from the soil, they drift rudderless and aimless, ready to do anything, anywhere.

But in China it is not easy for anyone "to do anything, anywhere," in order to start life afresh. In that country a man, even if willing to work, cannot all at once become a scavenger, a labourer or a porter, for all workers, even the beggars, are incorporated into "guilds" or powerful, exclusive organisations. What then is there for a workless, homeless waif to do? To enlist in the army is not always easy or even possible. But it is often easy for a man to steal and, if he steals a rifle, to become a bandit.

To operate single-handed does not appeal to the Chinese, in whom courage is not usually a strong point; and the first thing that the new "bad man" does is to join a few others of the same kidney. Thus are formed little bands which, lured by the prospect of small profits but quick returns—perhaps a gun here, or a dollar there—plunder indiscriminately and murder casual travellers from ambush. This particularly pernicious form of brigandage is seasonal and is especially rife before the corn and kaoliang harvest, when the tall standing grain along the roads provides excellent cover. *Pan Tze Shou* ("The hand that comes out of the corn") is the name sometimes applied to these petty robbers, who are known throughout China by the generic name of *Tzei* (Thieves).

Before long the beginners tire of their dangerous and not always remunerative methods, and join as paid hands one of the many powerful "co-operative societies" which can work with greater results and less risk. These societies, directed by able chiefs assisted by real general staffs, to which are assigned precise duties, have their agents in shops, banks, inns, and even in the government offices,

and operate on a definite plan and large scale. They hold up caravans, from which they collect tribute in money or kind, and kidnap rich travellers for ransom.

If the *tzei* succeeds in joining a big organisation, he advances in rank and is called a *t'u fei* (pirate). This word is usually spoken in a whisper, for it carries with it a certain prestige in that it is applied only to members of those powerful bands which are given to calling themselves "Association for the Maintenance of Peace," "Committee for the Protection of Ways and Communications," etc., etc. With them mere banditry is an organised racket.

Far from terrorising the peasants, these societies treat them well and are scrupulous in paying for any food which they may requisition for their troops. This word "troops" is used because it is now a matter of veritable armies of racketeers, whose chiefs, powerful robber barons, usually become anxious to regularise their position. Sooner or later, on some favourable occasion, they offer to submit to the government on condition that they are given military rank and that their troops are embodied in the regular army. As no other course of action is open to the Government, it generally agrees, and the leaders are appointed colonels or generals, according to the importance of the forces they control. At the same time the rank and file become soldiers, paid at two dollars a month, fed, quartered and clothed at the expense of the community.

This assimilation by an organism of its own toxins would be very ingenious if the Chinese governors could by thus militarising them make real soldiers out of all the scallywags in their provinces. But as soldiers this riff-raff continue their depredations, to which their uniform serves to give the appearance of legality. Moreover, the newly created military chiefs have rivals who keep the country in

turmoil. Their position is precarious, and they know full well that once they are vanquished they will lose both power and wealth.

If the "Association for the Maintenance of Peace," after having been transformed into—say—the 9th Division, should meet with strong competition from the "Committee for the Protection of Ways and Communications," or if business is bad, its chief—the recently created general—may not be able to pay his troops. In that case their discipline deteriorates, and if business grows worse they desert by whole battalions and regain their freedom of action whilst naturally retaining their arms. This is the most serious thing that can happen, because the deserters are now *tu li tui* (independent soldiers), who murder, loot and burn at will. When there is nothing more to ravage, they begin again to take thought for the future, and seek another powerful chief who will once more incorporate them in the army. And so it goes on. From this it is possible to appreciate what is behind the old Chinese proverb :

Pu Yung Hao Tie Tsuo Ting
Mei Yu Hao Jen Tang Ping.

Which may be translated "Good iron is not used to make nails, nor are good men to make soldiers."

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Since its arrival in China the Expedition had had the opportunity of sampling every class of bandit. In April, the China Group met Chang, "The Wild Cat," the former powerful brigand leader who had become a divisional commander¹; before reaching Suchow it had encountered some of the *tu li tui*, ex-soldiers of Mâ Chung-ying's army; and finally had had dealings with Mâ Chung-ying himself, an outstanding example of an official "bad man."

¹ See p. 118.



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OLD FLINT-LOCK MUSKETS

If lesser brigands had escaped our notice, it was only because they had not dared to attack thirty well-armed Europeans.

Nevertheless, we were on our guard on the morning of the 26th January, when we came in sight of the city of Ling Ho, for there, according to General Mâ, the danger-zone began. Great, therefore, was our astonishment on approaching the city to see the gates close and the uniformed inhabitants take refuge behind the walls. Apparently they took our cars and trailers for field artillery and were more afraid of us than we were of them. Forty miles farther east lay the town of Wu Yuen. We had no idea who occupied it, but there, as at Ling Ho, the unexpectedness of our arrival caused confusion. Armed men, brandishing rifles, fled in all directions, and only after we had passed did they recover their presence of mind sufficiently to send some cavalry after us. But they had no chance of catching up with us. The road was good ; and sailing ahead at full speed, we left them standing.

Petro, who was in the pilot-lorry, wished to get information as to the road ahead ; but it was too dangerous to stop at a village and question the inhabitants, as the lorry might easily have been surrounded and attacked. He therefore accosted a camel-driver who was coming with his animals from the opposite direction.

"Hey . . . Lao Han (Hey, old son of Han), where are you going ? "

"I am going west," the old man replied cautiously.

"Have you eaten ? "

"I apologise. I did not wait for you."¹

"Where do you come from ? "

"From the east."

After this exchange of courtesies, Petro offered him a

¹ Polite question and answer corresponding to our "How do you do ? " "I'm very well, thanks, and you ? "

cigarette. The man lit it, inhaled deeply, blew the smoke voluptuously through his nostrils and then squatted down comfortably on his heels, ready for a friendly chat.

"Is it . . ." Petro began, "on the road—er—possible to travel?"

"Can do, so, so."

Although Petro wanted to bring the conversation round to the subject of bandits, he did not dare ask a direct question of a stranger, who might himself be one.

"Anything doing on the road?"

"Nothing that one could call"—he hesitated, licking his lips with his tongue—"really exciting."

"Who do the soldiers on the road belong to?"

"How can one tell. Soldiers or bandits, they all look alike."

The fact that the man had uttered the word "bandit" shewed that he was not one.

"Well, is the road safe?"

"That depends on your luck."

This seemed to be all that could be extracted from the fellow.

"Offer him another cigarette."

"A whole packet," Petro replied, "wouldn't produce anything more definite."

On the advice of Pecqueur, who was his military adviser, Haardt gave instructions that we should travel at dust-intervals, and that each car should keep touch with the next in front and behind. But this was not easy on *loess* soil, where the cars had to keep at least 100 yards apart, and the column of nine vehicles was 800 yards in length, without any allowance for the inevitable straggling. A strong head wind added to the difficulty of regulating the pace.

On the 27th the fourth car in the column was in trouble owing to deficient compression caused by the dust, which even the special air-filters were unable to keep out. For some time it travelled slowly, and at four in the afternoon stopped for the sparking-plugs to be changed. As a result of this and of a similar halt on the part of the seventh car, when the head of the convoy reached a small village called Pa-tze-ku-lin,¹ the column found itself split up into two parts separated by five miles.

No sooner did its head enter the village than some soldiers appeared from a farmyard, and, with rifles levelled, ordered it to halt. At the same time, behind the banks on either side of the road, numbers of others showed up ready to open fire. The convoy did not stop, for to do so meant that it might never start again. Suddenly several shots rang out, and the first three vehicles were halted to discover what was going on. A volley had been fired at Audouin-Dubreuil's car. He got out at once, rifle in hand, and everyone else followed his example. The third car now came under fire, and while bullets whistled overhead, men were seen approaching across the fields, apparently in an attempt to surround the convoy. Point and Petro, who had passed through the village in their lorry, now came running back on foot, followed by Chauvet. Balourdet was already prepared for action with a machine gun, and without further ado returned the fire of the Chinese with a more effective weapon than any of theirs, shooting over their heads two strips of twenty rounds rapid.² Chauvet followed his example. At this prompt display of force all firing stopped and the place suddenly became empty. Thirty seconds passed.

"Cease fire," commanded Pecqueur, who noticed something on a long pole being waved from behind a wall.

¹ Near Patseloblong on the map.

² This was the gun which had been buried in the Bogdo Ola in July by the China Group and found intact in December after the departure from Urumchi.

It was a basket, but was apparently intended as a flag of truce. Pecqueur and Point made signs and laid their rifles on the ground. Three Chinese soldiers did likewise and then advanced, their faces expressing utter astonishment. "But we are soldiers," they said.

"Then why did you fire on us?"

"We thought you were brigands," said their officer as the men, one after another, came out of their hiding-places. The remark was not lacking in cynicism.

"Have you ever seen brigands travelling in motor-cars flying the French flag?"

The officer poured out excuses. He did not know who we were. "Let us agree," he concluded, "that it was a slight misunderstanding, and as no one has been wounded or killed forget the unfortunate incident. Come and have a cup of tea. Here is our general's card."

Petro took the card and read "General Su, Commander-in-Chief of the Independent Cavalry." The independent cavalry—and commanded by our friend General Su! Verily we had had a lucky escape. The officer then said that the General begged us to wait, as he wished to have a talk with us, and his headquarters were at some distance away.

What he wanted to talk about, no doubt, was our track-bands. But we had not the slightest intention of putting our heads between his jaws. He might keep the equipment, to which he seemed to attach so much importance. As soon as the other four cars joined us, therefore, we drove off into the darkness, to enjoy another sleepless night.

Eleven shots had been fired at Audouin-Dubreuil's car, some of the bullets being found in the cushions, and others in the tarpaulin cover of the trailer. The "Silver Crescent" really deserved a mention for gallantry. In

September, near Aksu, it had been through fire ; south of Ningsia it had been through water ; and now it had received its baptism of bullets. Two shots had also hit the kitchen-car, fortunately without damaging the radiator. It was remarkable that none of us had been touched. Next day the rays of a pale sun and the nearness of Paotow somewhat revived our spirits. That city was only forty miles away, but before we reached it we should have to pass through several suspect villages ; and the nearer we got to the great caravan centre, the more we had to fear looters. But the story of our resistance at Pa-tze-ku-lin had evidently been noised abroad, for as we ran through the villages without stopping, the inhabitants watched us from a respectful distance, showing only their heads above the walls. It was even reported that we were Japanese troops who had come from Mukden in tanks to invade the country from the north—a rumour which it would have been unwise to contradict.

Not far from Paotow we passed a motor-vehicle—the first we had seen since Urumchi. It was an old $\frac{3}{4}$ -ton Dodge lorry carrying twenty-five passengers bundled together and tied in with ropes. At each obstacle, or wherever the grade was too steep, they were obliged to get out and pull, for in China such obligatory help is included in the price of transport.

Three miles to go. Suddenly a strange sound startled us. Again it shrilled out—a piercing whistle which seemed to stretch right across the sky. The fact was that we had reached a railway, and what we had heard was the whistle of the train conveying to Paotow André Goerger, the General Secretary of the Expedition, who now witnessed the accomplishment of a task for the success of which he had striven heart and soul for three years. Having parted

from us in India, he now found us again in far Cathay. After having gone right round the world in the opposite direction via Paris, the United States and Japan, he now ended his travels in a little Chinese inn, where together with rum and *Caporal* cigarettes, in the way of material comforts, he brought us our letters, and above all heartened us with a sense of victory.

"And that's that ! All's well that ends well ! " said Audouin-Dubreuil, beaming.

"You have had a narrow escape," remarked Goerger thoughtfully.

He was right. A few hours after our arrival came confirmation of the rumour that the lorry we had passed six miles out from the city had been attacked, that three of its passengers had been killed, and that the rest, stripped and robbed of their money, had just painfully reached Paotow as naked as when they were born. We saw the driver, who was unhurt, but had quite lost his nerve and begged us to take him as far as Kalgan, so that he could again carry on his business. There were bandits there, also, but not of the same kidney. They played the game, and always fired a shot in the air as a warning. The driver then stopped—and they looted the passengers ! Aggrieved and indignant, he shook his head.

"Here, they have burned my lorry. What harm did my lorry do to them, except to bring them business ? No ! Give me Kalgan bandits every time. They at least are gentlemen ! "

CHAPTER XX

IN THE GRASS COUNTRY

Gai Ming, the Tibetan monk—The lamas of Peilingmiao—Fireworks in the desert—At the Court of Prince Hsi Hsu-ning—Farewell to Gombo—Mile 7,219.

THOUGH the monastery of Peilingmiao is only 120 miles north of Paotow, it might well be in another world, for it is in the "Grass Country" (Chan Ho T'o), which begins "behind the mountains." We caught our first glimpse of it before dawn, and the sight was unforgettable. In the centre of a vast amphitheatre, deep in shadow, stood a low hill, upon which, like offerings piled upon an altar, were ranged tier upon tier of monastic cells. And when the sun topped the hills and its rays caught the roofs of the temples, the gilded pinnacles blazed out like altar candles. Then a gentle breeze wafted away the mist and unveiled before our wondering eyes a fairy city, with alabaster walls and roofs of blue faience, rising from out the desert.

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The spiritual leader of this monastery, Delegate of the Pantchen Lama¹ and Holy Brother of the Order of the Virtuous, was Gai Ming. This Tibetan of the inscrutable countenance was also a Lha-ram-pa, or learned doctor of theology from the great monastery of Labran—one of the

¹ The correct title of this "living Buddha" is Pantchen Erdeni (Tachi) Lama. He resides at Tashilumpu, an eight days' journey to the west of Lhasa.

homes of the Buddhist religion. As we squatted in his *yurt*, on silken cushions of green and red, facing this fallow-looking monk seated on an iron bed between a massive silver bell and a paraffin lamp, his gaze, like his thoughts, seemed to pass over and through us and to lose itself beyond Time and Space, in the Infinite. Fingering the beads of his amber rosary, he thanked us in a soft and barely audible voice for our greetings, and reminded us that ever since the first visit of the Expedition to Peiling-miao, prayers had been offered up for its success.

“Tell him that the prayers have not been in vain. The journey has succeeded miraculously.”

This first exchange of courtesies lasted some minutes, for the lama spoke in Tibetan to his secretary, who translated into Mongolian; Gombo, our interpreter, then repeated the sentence in Chinese to Petro, who, in his turn, translated it into French. Despite this “relayed” conversation, we were all most anxious to understand one another.

“How is His Holiness the Pantchen Lama?”

“His Holiness is in good health. You will meet him on your way, a little farther to the east.”

While we were being served with salted tea and butter, Gai Ming, in his voluminous robe of brocaded silk, sat motionless as an idol. Hackin, who had devoted himself to the study of Buddhism for twenty years,¹ now wrote on a leaf of his notebook a greeting and an invocation in Tibetan. On reading it Gai Ming was astonished into volubility, and his eyes gleamed: “The Holy characters! Who are you, and from what country do you come?”

But Hackin shook his head. “Tell him that I can write Tibetan, but cannot speak it.”

Then, in his turn, Gai Ming wrote a sentence: “What is the name of your greatest prophet?”

¹ M. Joseph Hackin has translated some Tibetan works into French.

"Jesus, born eight centuries before Padmasambarà."

"Jesus," repeated Gai Ming. "He, too, taught that there is only one God, whose word can neither be altered nor changed. Alas!" He sighed, twirling between his fingers, like a teetotum, a miniature prayer-wheel of chased silver. "The centuries pass, and people have begun to argue about the Word and to interpret it according to their own fancy. Innumerable tributaries have muddled the flow of the great River. Our mission is to ensure that the Word of God retains its original form. What were the men of your race doing at the time of Padmasambarà?"

Here was a poser! What exactly did the Merovingians do—those "*rois fainéants*!" But Gai Ming, without waiting for a reply, continued solemnly: "Jesus, Buddha, Mahomet—three manifestations of one Divine Power. When you see the reflection of the moon in a pool or a well, you think there are two or three moons. Is it not the same thing?"

Sauvage, waiting outside, was becoming impatient. All his apparatus was in order, but with 30° of frost the compensator had frozen and had to be thawed with the blow-lamp in order to free the wheels, which were gummed up in the congealed paraffin oil. He broke in: "The light is beginning to change. May we take your photograph?"

Gai Ming assented. But he recoiled before the strange-looking box with big crystal eyes, fearing that the turning of the handle might bring a curse upon him. Perhaps these people wished to take not only his likeness, but, with it, part of his soul.

As the Tibetan trumpets were sounding the call to prayer, we asked permission to film the exterior of the temples. The spiritual leader of the monastery was opposed to this, but the Abbot—the temporal leader—had not been averse to accepting a sum of four hundred dollars, for it would enable the two thousand yellow lamas of

Peilingmiao to supplement their usual meagre diet of boiled millet, tea and butter with the luxury of cakes made of flour. He had even gone so far as to promise to arrange a Dance of the Demons in the courtyard.

The conditions were favourable for photography—a bright sun, no wind, and a clear atmosphere. The camera was ready, the microphone installed, and the insulated cables connected up with the car alongside. In the gloom of the interior of the temple it was just possible to make out at the end of the sanctuary an immense figure of Buddha in gilded wood, with his fixed gaze and ineffably radiant serenity. Between the columns could be seen human forms enveloped in heavy robes, and from the semi-darkness rose the intoning of prayers. At the entrance to the temple were the novices, singing, and their nasal voices mingled with the droning of the aged monks, whose bodies swayed to and fro with a censer-like rhythm. The odour of incense ; the sight of the gleaming float-lights, the reflections of old gold, the tarnished hangings ; and the sound of the religious chants in Tibetan¹; all combined to create an atmosphere of mystery, which overcame curiosity and led to the contemplation of the Infinite—the Divine.

After two hours the ceremony suddenly came to an end, and a squalid mob in purple togas invaded the courtyard. Williams, with his camera and black cloth, was an object of much curiosity. But he had had experience of crowds in many countries, and his broad sympathetic grin was infectious. Without any interpreter, he gradually, by winks, signs, and beckonings, manœuvred the whole crowd into position before the camera, and kept in check the turbulence which would have become hostile at the slightest provocation.

Hackin, who remained apart, was able, thanks to his learning and specialised knowledge, to appreciate all he

¹ The Latin of the Mongols.



Ph. M. O. Williams, copyright N.G.S

LAMA TRUMPETERS

saw, and in spite of the cold made a detailed examination of a fresco on one of the walls of the vestibule. It depicted a Bhavasakra—the Wheel of Life, in which the destiny of Man is shewn in the sectors of a circle.

“How could a philosophy be more clearly expounded”—he turned to Father Teilhard—“than by this Wheel of Excellence, where the spirit passes successively through the different worlds, is purified and takes part in the various stages of meditation, until at last it attains perfection? . . .”

“The thieves!” broke in Sauvage, beside himself with anger. “How can I carry on? There is nothing they will not steal. They have already pinched three screws from my tripod.” It was not, however, easy to disperse this surging humanity—the very antithesis of Buddhist calm.

“We shall never really understand the East,” continued Hackin, “where everything is elusive and evanescent. That public prayer was deeply impressive, but in its turn it has escaped us. In Asia there is something which is intangible; something impervious to guns or to machinery; something which says ‘No!’ Take Gandhi.—What can we do to win over these people and how can we fight against their superstitions?”

“In this case,” said Haardt, “their ‘superstition’ is probably due to the fact that our offering is not considered sufficiently large, or has been badly distributed.”

This cynical explanation, however, was not entirely justified, for the Abbot, who now refused to have the ritual dance filmed, returned the money paid him.

“Three hundred and fifty dollars exactly,” counted Pecqueur, “but we gave him four hundred!”

The other fifty doubtless remained in the folds of the Abbot’s ample robe—perhaps for the upkeep of the lamps of the monastery!

We left Peilingmiao on the morning of the 5th February, and about eleven that night noticed a luminous efflorescence spread across the sky just above the horizon. At midnight we were startled by fireworks—multi-coloured arabesques, golden rains, and maroons, which rose to a great height and then fell and burst quite close, and we suddenly found ourselves surrounded by a festive throng.

“The Pantchen Lama is here, and there will be a big show on to-morrow . . . a unique spectacle, and the Prince, through his chamberlain, begs us all to accept his hospitality,” shouted Point excitedly.

In amazement, against a background, now of deep shadow, now of brilliant light, we watched unfold before us a fantastic and totally unexpected scene : resplendent noblemen ; courtesans of exquisite grace ; warriors of another age—all as unreal as the characters in a fairy tale. Preceded by Prince Hsi Hsu-ning's chamberlain, lantern-bearers descended a white felt-covered flight of steps leading to three doors guarded by immense stone figures, and servants in plumed caps conducted us to a palace—which seemed to have risen from the sand at the wave of some magician's wand. Crossing a courtyard, we entered a large room, in which the soft light of many candles shone on ebony furniture, carved panelling and painted porcelain. Here the chamberlain, in the name of his master and sovereign, invited us to take supper. “To-night it is not fitting,” he said, smiling, “for distinguished visitors to continue their journey in the Mongolian steppes. The night of the Tsagane¹ is not for travelling.”

The following day it seemed as if an epoch from the shadows of the past had come to life again. Greeted by the hoarse notes of the Tibetan trumpets, the sun was already gilding the roofs of the palace and the temple—the only stone buildings to be found amongst the squat domes of

¹ The first day of the first moon—the Mongol New Year.

the *yurts*. This drab-hued city of felt had been in existence but a few hours. It housed the seven barons who had come with their subjects to ask the blessing of the Living Buddha—the Pantchen Lama, one of the two Pontiffs of Buddhist Lamaism.¹

Garbed in a black silk caftan bordered with ermine, Prince Hsi Hsu-ning reverently prostrated himself before a small altar which had been erected in the sand to face the rising sun. Behind him gathered a crowd, the magnificence of whose costumes was astounding. Although the colours were very brilliant and contrasted sharply, they made as harmonious a setting as the purple silk robes, orange sashes and yellow caps of the archers. Princes could be recognised by their embroidered coats, and officials by their brocade jackets or their caps adorned with the hierarchical globe of lapis lazuli, coral or crystal.

All the aristocracy of the country was gathered here—an old nobility which had remained faithful to the pigtail and the fashions of the ancient Manchurian court. They made way deferentially, as the Prince, having finished his prayers, proceeded under a yellow silk sunshade to the Pavilion of Honour of the Pantchen Lama, and the Tibetan bodyguard of His Holiness presented arms in European fashion. Then, one by one, in order of precedence, from the Princes of the Blood to the humblest desert dweller, these Mongols, who were at home only on horseback, marched awkwardly in their heavy curly-soled boots up to the sanctuary which sheltered the Pontiff. Against their silken robes, bordered with fox or lynx, dangled dagger and pouch of flints.

¹ Since Tibet was freed from the suzerainty of China the religious authority of the Dalai Lama over the Mongols is not accepted by the Chinese, who recognise the Pantchen Lama alone as the pontiff of the Buddhist religion in China. They receive him with royal honours. On his last visit to Peking, stepping down from the special train which was formerly that of the Empress Hsu Hsi, the Pantchen Lama was conducted to his residence between two lines of troops, through streets carpeted with yellow silk, the Imperial colour.

When they had received the blessing, they congratulated each other according to ancient custom. The vassals, kneeling before their lords, touched the hand, which then invited them to rise with a gesture so courtly that this time-old ceremonial seemed to do honour to their vassalage. Then, exchanging snuff boxes twice, they pronounced formal good wishes.

Thus the hours passed in a round of courtesies and salutations, those who had not yet been received patiently waiting their turn. To us nobody paid any attention.

To learn more of the Mongolian people would have necessitated a stay of at least six months, possibly even six years. But we Westerners are the slaves of time. And, in our case, three months of delay had already upset our plans and the whole of our time-table for the return journey. And so we set off once more. But from our short visit to Prince Hsi Hsu-ning we carried away a vivid and lasting impression. We had been permitted a glimpse of Imperial China—the old China which these Mongols had formerly ruled. Though we got no more than a glimpse of them, their images will not fade from our memory.

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At Serben, thirty-six miles farther east, Gombo bade us farewell. He had got back home, where he found his old mother watching her iron stock-pot exactly as he had left her ten months earlier. In the *yurt* nothing was changed : neither the camel-dung fire, the position of the three Buddhas on the small domestic altar, nor the tears of the old lady, who, on seeing her son, cried just as she had done when she parted from him.

“ There have been rumours,” she said, “ that a Chinese camel-driver stated that he had heard in Kalgan that it had been given out in the Nanking newspapers that a Mongol guide had been abandoned by foreigners in the heart of the desert and left without food or water.”

She had believed her son dead. Gombo comforted her. He was well, and had returned safely with the foreigners, whom he looked upon as friends.

"Then why will you not come with us to Europe?" enquired Haardt.

Europe! How often during our wanderings had Gombo sought to find out what this distant land was like: whether the soil was cultivated: whether there were camels, deserts, and *obos* to mark the road as there were here. He shook his head with great dignity:

"Your people would regard me as a strange animal, and I should be ridiculous." A wise man!

When we said good-bye to Gombo and his little hamlet of Serben, which was soon lost to sight, we left behind the Land of Grass and its monotonous undulations. It is a country where the plough is unknown and where the only laws are those of Nature. There, in the soil, men and beasts alike find their joys, share their struggles, suffer the same hardships. In it all God's creatures can live freely, following the dictates of a wisdom the equity of which civilisation has not yet been able to upset. There the limitation of armaments, which to-day so largely occupies the attention of the world, has existed from time immemorial. This it is which enables equally both wolves and deer to perpetuate their species, and prevents the stronger from exterminating the weaker. For the voracity of the one is countered by the speed of the other—a just balance between the weapons of attack and the "guarantee of security."

The men, neither artisans, labourers nor tradesmen, live happily on the soil, which supplies their wants, without any heed either for acquisition or destruction. The grass is their mainstay—a veritable gift from God, and a seeming miracle in a land where it hardly ever rains and the only water comes from melted snows.

Such was the nature of the country which ended at the

borders of the Mongolian plateau, giving place to *ming ti* (cultivated land), where the Chinese once more appeared.

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A road guarded by watch-towers descended sharply to Kalgan—the first plunge down to the fertile valleys and the peoples of the Chinese coast. And the lower we went, the higher rose the temperature. But, improved as the material conditions were for us, we were now suddenly overwhelmed by the accumulated weariness of many long weeks. This was understandable. And it was not so much the result of the hard physical strain to which we had been subjected—already forgotten—as the moral reaction in the subconscious realisation that we were about to arrive at the goal which was to be the culmination of our efforts and the end of an unforgettable period in our lives.

But the communal existence we had shared for nearly a year made us the more ready to appreciate the charm of a normal life, where in peaceful contemplation each one could recall and live over again his own experiences.

On the 10th February we crossed the Pass of Nankow. Next day we were greeted by some of our countrymen, the first we had seen for many weeks, who, with tears in their eyes, received us on the steps of a great stone building—the French College of the Marist Missionaries.

“Wine from France?” was our question, joyously repeated by Father Anthony as he opened a window: “Not at all. It is local grown. Look at the vines we have planted.”

On the morning of the 12th February, the 315th day since our departure from Beirut, we had only eleven miles to go, on an easy well-paved road bordered by monoliths, now with a row of trees on each side, now enclosed by stone walls, and now passing by shops, the swinging signs and gilded panels of which indicated the approach to a great

town. Then, in the midst of market-carts, rickshaws, old-fashioned coupés, wedding and funeral processions, we passed under a massive archway—the Western Gate of Peking.

“ Mile 7,219.”

The view on either side of the wide avenue which we followed was interrupted by passing trams and motor-cars, and it was only when we reached the Forbidden City that we could see something of its grandeur—reflected in the calm surface of a lake, exhibited in an imposing wall of red brick, or given an imperial tinge by the yellow tiles on the concave sloping roofs of the Winter Palace.

At each turning our drivers put out their hands, mindful of the procession of cars. A traffic-policeman raised his white baton at the entrance to the diplomatic quarter, where we came to asphalt streets and stone façades. Again we turned to the right and passed under a high stone porch. We had then only to follow the gravel path winding between lawns to reach the arched colonnade—the spot where the whole of European Peking stood waiting to receive us.

The subdued murmur of conversation suddenly ceased. There was silence amongst the nations as a clear voice rang out :

“ I am happy to welcome you to the French Legation at Peking, the end of your long and heroic journey.”

CHAPTER XXI

JOURNEY'S END

Reception at the French Legation—Plans for the return journey—
Death of Georges-Marie Haardt—France in Asia—Marseilles.

“ . . . While carrying the name of your country to the very heart of the ancient world of Asia your investigations will throw fresh light on this old continent, which the human races believes to have been its cradle. Your achievements testify to a determination which could have been maintained only by the ever-present thought of *La Patrie*.”

When M. Lagarde, Councillor of the Embassy in Peking, had finished his address and Haardt had returned thanks on behalf of the Expedition, there was an impressive silence. And then, naturally, we were overwhelmed by a flood of questions from people eager for details : Which had been our hardest time ? What had impressed us most ? What had been our greatest danger ? To satisfy their curiosity was not easy.

As we stood, glass in hand, as much dazed as elated by the warmth of our reception and the atmosphere of refinement and comfort in which we again so suddenly found ourselves, we had, like all travellers from the desert, but one desire—to have a bath.

To slip into the warm water and for a moment to escape from our recollections—the misery of the millions of Chinese peasants ; the anachronism of the pomp and circumstance of the rajahs ; the propaganda of Islam ;

the antagonism between Anglo-Saxon and Slav ; the spirit of independence amongst the Mongols, and last, but not least, the war between China and Japan. Obsessed by Asia, as we had been for ten months, was it possible to forget her even for one short hour ? It was not. The telephone rang incessantly and insistently. Invitations flowed in. There were telegrams from Paris. And in the Peking, Shanghai and Hongkong newspapers appeared long articles on French prestige in the Far East and of the " face " we had now gained, as the Chinese Authorities themselves seemed to bow before our success, and Marshal Tchang Hsueh-liang had given out that he would like to receive Haardt and his staff officially.

Nevertheless, a few days after our arrival the hurry and bustle of departure began again in the great Peking hotel, where each one had the luxury of a room to himself, and, in addition to receiving an accumulation of correspondence, had to enter a whirl of social life which was almost bewildering. Now, once again absorbed in our own affairs and without a common preoccupation, we no longer had the same outlook. Yet the twinkle of an eye at a chance meeting in the hotel, or at a reception, official dinner, or cocktail-party, was sufficient to recall memories of rough experiences shared and to revive the sentiment of a wonderful fellowship.

We had attained our objective—Peking. But our stay was to last only fifteen days ; and we wondered if it would be possible in that time to extract from Peking an explanation of the difficulties, checks and annoyances we had experienced during the last five months ? Coming from the highlands of Asia, we had entered the immensity of China by its most distant and most ill-defined frontiers. We had had all the surprises and sensations we wanted and, unlike the tourists landing at Tientsin or Shanghai, who were curious about streets, people or faces, we sought elucidation

rather than mystery or thrills, and the logical rather than the picturesque.

As in Peking no one but the visitor showed any enthusiasm for the things of the past, the present, we thought, would surely be a subject of passionate interest to those who might have to play a part in shaping the future, namely the cultured Chinese youth, product of Oxford, Harvard or Moscow. Would they not perhaps be able to enlighten us regarding such problems as were presented by Sinkiang, Kansu, and even they themselves? But, alas, they seemed to have little knowledge of the present—of things as they actually were, and we were doomed to remain in ignorance. For nationals of this type the region we had traversed was just a colony, a figment of Chinese expansion, and no more. It was too far away. It was an embarrassment and would far better be independent. For them it was of little account except as a potential source of oil supply.

Any enquiry as to the exact nature of this Chinese nationalism, about which so much was said at Geneva in the name of four hundred millions of people, appeared to be a classic question and elicited a smile. It was for us to define what we implied by "nationalism." If we meant that violent sentiment, subject to certain definite laws, which for some of the peoples of Europe dates back no further than the French Revolution, and for others only to the years succeeding the Great War, China was not yet ready for it. If we meant that fundamental race-consciousness which has always been the bond of union between men, here in China it had never ceased to exist. The Manchus realised this, for though they had been established in the country for three centuries, they had always remained foreigners.

To the additional question—whether the peasants of Central China, who subsisted on roots and every year lost forty per cent of their children from cold and hunger,

were similarly to be regarded as foreigners, the answer was : " Not at all." The reason why the Chinese from the north and south did not go to their aid was because it was impossible to get provisions to them, there being no communications nor means of transport ; because in a country with a population ten times that of France the revenue was no more than four milliards ¹ ; and because the general misery was due to insecurity, arbitrary taxation, extortion and pillage.

The Chinese admitted it all, but possessed their souls in patience, and were entirely vague as to when they would be able to reorganise and improve matters. And as their aspirations for the future were mixed up with their pride in the past, their smile now became enigmatic and their look evasive. No more questions !

Wisdom was not to be sought for in the past. It was to be found in a more practical and modern life based on the consciousness of a strength regained. Only when China succeeded in acquiring that consciousness would she be comprehensible to foreigners, for only then would her weaknesses disappear.

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We had now to think out our own immediate future. One alternative—namely to cross China from north to south, passing through the southern provinces and entering Tonking by the frontier of Kwangsi—was ruled out. The journey itself would be long and difficult enough ; but even longer and more difficult would be the process of obtaining sanction for it. This might be granted at Peking, refused at Loyang, or suspended at Nanking, for China was in a chronic state of anarchy, and its struggle with Japan was coming to a head. It would on the whole be far simpler for men and material to go by sea direct from Tientsin to Haiphong, and then continue the journey

¹ Of paper francs.

by land. This course was decided on, and the Expedition was therefore again divided into two groups. The first, was to embark at Tientsin, and proceed direct to Indo-China. Haardt and some of his colleagues were to follow, stopping three days at Shanghai on the way, to thank personally the French Minister, Monsieur Wilden, and Admiral Heer, commanding the French Naval forces in the Far East, for their never-failing help to the Expedition during its passage across China.

In three weeks the Citroën-Central-Asian Expedition, re-formed at Hanoi, would be able to get across Indo-China before the rainy season set in. For the further continuation of the journey beyond Indo-China the projects under consideration included a return by Siam, Burmah, India, and Southern Persia, to rejoin at Hamadan the Baghdad road, which would take us back to our starting point—Beirut.

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On the 3rd March Shanghai was in a state of siege, and corpses strewed the suburbs of Chapei. The Japanese had taken away their dead, but as the Chinese had not done likewise, the smell from the gutted houses was terrible. To go out-of-doors at night without a pass was forbidden. Every day thousands of Chinese, with their possessions piled on rickshaws, fled for safety from the suburbs into the Concessions. With them slipped in a certain number of bad characters, and fighting took place in the streets.

Admiral Heer received Haardt on board the old cruiser *Waldeck-Rousseau*, which was moored ready for action in front of the French Consulate-General. Through her half-open ports could be heard all the sounds and noises of a country in which daily life was in full activity, but which, nevertheless, was in the grip of a deadly fear.

This was the same China in which we had been travelling for long months, and on which we had left no more trace

than if we had walked across a sheet of water. For us it had begun at the Kilik Pass—in the *yurt* of the first Khirgiz shepherd—and it finished to-day at Shanghai with M. Tche Ki-chu, Secretary of the Havas Agency, translating at sight from French into Chinese the last speech of M. Paul Boncour.

We had seen China in different guises—nomad ; sedentary ; and timidly official. Now we saw her more confident, suddenly proposing to govern a province with a dictator. We had found her Muhammadan, mediæval, sovietic, Christian ; independent and ground down by brigand chiefs ; lama-ridden, Mongolian, and divided into tribes ; feudal under a prince commanding a dozen standards. We had known her learned in the laboratories of the National Geological Survey ; worldly in diplomatic salons ; moribund in the gardens of the Winter Palace, and here, at Shanghai, revived, republican and patriotic in face of the Japanese machine guns.

As Georges-Marie Haardt watched Shanghai from the deck of the American steamer carrying him to Hong-kong and on to Indo-China, he stifled a sigh of regret at the sight of this civilisation to which he had just returned. And while the enormous city receded into the distance, it seemed little by little to turn away its face, as if to hide the last aspect of a China which, under its Western make-up, was perhaps the most enigmatic of all.

We said farewell to the *Waldeck-Rousseau*, with her great tricolour sweeping the poop, and to the *Craonne*, the smart little light-grey despatch-boat alongside, with her wireless antennæ stretched aloft and her 5-inch guns pointing to the skies.

“ She never failed us,” said Haardt thoughtfully, “ and in all this hubbub managed to hear us when we called to her from the desert.”

He gathered his coat closer round him as if he were cold, and shivered. We pressed him to stop at Hongkong. A week's rest before landing in Indo-China and again being immersed in the thick of things would enable him to work out the route for Burmah and the crossing of India in peace and quiet. We had to insist before he agreed to stay even for a few days, leaving the rest of us—with the exception of Pecqueur and Petro—to go on to Haiphong to join the others. He would rejoin all of us at Hanoi.

But he gave in unwillingly to the strange lassitude which had seized him and which was for him an entirely new experience.

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On the morning of the 16th March all the vehicles of the Expedition had landed at Haiphong, ready to leave in the evening for Hanoi. Haardt was still at Hongkong, with Pecqueur and Petro. But we at Haiphong were expecting all three of them to join us shortly.

There was a grey light in the watery sky, as we stood near the cars, vaguely waiting for a signal, because the Resident-Mayor of the town had expressed a desire to receive us and bid us welcome to Tonkin. Audouin-Dubreuil and Point had been called away to the telephone to take an urgent message from the Governor-General and had not returned. When they came in sight we prepared to board the cars. But Audouin-Dubreuil, very pale, beckoned us to gather round him. He had something to tell us.

"Yesterday I received very disquieting news. Now I have just learned the terrible truth. Haardt, my old comrade and the leader of us all, died last night at Hongkong from double pneumonia."

With heads bowed, we remained motionless for some moments, without being able to take in what we had heard. To those who had left him in Peking the previous

month the news came as a shock that was stupefying. But for Point and myself, who had said good-bye to our Chief in Hongkong only a few days before, it brought so distinctly before us his recent gestures and the sound of his voice, that his personality, thus suddenly evoked, had never seemed so vivid. It was as if his disembodied spirit had hastened to advise us how to act in view of his tragic and unexpected disappearance. The minutes passed. There was no contradiction of the news, which had at first seemed hardly credible. Slowly came conviction of its accuracy.

Without doubt, when Haardt arrived at Peking he was a very tired man, and his powers of resistance were further reduced by the cold, which did not suit him. A loss of voice had prevented his replying to the demonstrations of which he had been the object, and he had been forced to take to his bed for two days. The diagnosis of Delastre had been confirmed by that of the English specialist called in consultation—a slight attack of influenza, necessitating only a few days' rest. Doubtless he had been unwise in attending too soon, against the repeated warnings of Delastre, the various dinners and receptions; and when he left Tientsin, feeling slightly better, he had firmly refused to allow the doctor to accompany him, considering that the latter's place was with the majority of the members of the Expedition, who were about to be exposed to the sudden change of a tropical climate.

At Shanghai, official ceremonies and other functions allowed him no respite. And it was after this, on the advice of the local doctor, that he determined to take a rest at Hongkong.

Later we learned what had happened. On landing at Hongkong on the 12th March, in very cold and foggy weather, he was conveyed to Repulse Bay, which is about twenty minutes from the city. There he was obliged to take to his bed, and the Governor's medical adviser diagnosed a

severe attack of influenza. A blood test had not revealed any other symptoms.

On Sunday the 13th, as his condition had not improved, it was decided to call in Professor Gerrard in consultation. Next day the joint diagnosis was still a very severe attack of influenza, which demanded a rest of at least three weeks. On Tuesday, the 15th, pneumonia developed in the lower lobe of the left lung. But during the day the malady made no further progress. The only thing to be feared was heart failure.

Though his temperature rose to 40°, Haardt's morale was unshaken, and he wished to continue working, but Pecqueur would not hear of it. During the night he had difficulty in breathing, and oxygen was administered. Towards three in the morning of the 16th, his temperature went down, and he asked for his suitcase and papers, but was content with the reply that everything could be put in order on the morrow. His breathing became slower and more feeble, and by 3.40 a.m. all was over.

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And so on the 17th March the congratulations which M. Pasquier, Governor-General of Indo-China, had prepared for our welcome at Hanoi were suddenly changed into condolences and regrets. This day so eagerly awaited, to which we had all looked forward during the long winter nights as an occasion for rejoicing, became the saddest of the whole year's journey.

By Haardt's death each of us individually was deprived of an esteemed companion and chief. But the Expedition as a whole lost in him its representative and mainspring. Struck to its very core, the Citroën-Central-Asian Expedition might preserve as a heritage all that had been achieved in the past, but the future would add nothing to it. There was no longer any reason for the extended homeward journey contemplated by way of Burmah, India, and Persia,

and the programme was cut down to a speedy return.

During the days which followed, as the numbing effect of the shock gradually wore off, our grief became more poignant. Fate seemed too cruel and our loss irreparable. This enterprise had been planned for three years. During long months Haardt, with André Citroën, had carefully studied every aspect of it. The idea had taken root, had imposed itself, and then after ceaseless activity on the part of many, had triumphed over all obstacles until the moment of departure, when, taking leave of the West, the Expedition had embarked on its own extraordinary and independent career.

During eleven months, in the burning sands of Syria, in the rocky valleys of Persia and Afghanistan, clinging to the Himalayan slopes, wandering in the high valleys of the Pamirs, subjected to the trickery of the Chinese, threatened and pursued by marauding brigands, and escaping only by crossing vast frozen wastes, the Expedition had, thanks to its leader, never for a moment despaired of achieving its object. Enriched by 5,000 photographs, 200,000 feet of film, drawings, ethnographical documents, mineralogical specimens, objects of art and collections of flora and fauna, it had attained its principal aims.

Silent and tenacious, Haardt had been able to inspire one and all with his own remarkable energy, which was born of a mystic optimism and an indomitable patience.

By what curious desire for revenge had Fate in this case withheld from the victor the supreme joy of accomplishment, which for a spirit such as his, is the only true reward ?

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“The man is dead, but his work lives. Bring back to France the body of your leader. I share your grief. André Citroën.”

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On the eight-century-old route from Hanoi to Hué, now
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graded and tarred, a whole population of workers passed to and fro. Their loads balanced on their heads, or carried in baskets slung from flexible bamboos, were the signs of a task which seemed the easier for being performed under the shade of a parasol. These things impressed us because in the misery and anarchy of Central China we had forgotten that there existed a peaceful and industrious Asia, governed by rational principles. We found it at Vinh, Hué, Tourane, and in all the villages in Indo-China under French rule.

It might have been possible in other circumstances to shew to those still obstinately sceptical on the subject the beneficent influence which, in spite of certain errors, Western civilisation has on the natives of Asia. But a thread had been broken. Each one, perhaps unconsciously, hastened on, his thoughts centred on a last and touching meeting.

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On the 4th April, 1932, a year to the day since our departure from Beirut, the good ship *Felix-Roussel* rounded Cap Saint-Jacques, slowly ascended the Saigon River, and proceeded to go alongside. A fierce sun beat down on the flag-stones of the quay, where, lined up in front of seven track-cars and two lorries, the members of the Expedition awaited a coffin.

A month later, on the 29th April, in the morning mist, a launch approached the great steamer as she entered the Marseilles Roads. A man, dressed in black, slowly clambered up the companion-ladder. André Citroën, who a year previously had said farewell to Haardt for the last time, when he left France, now wished to be the first to salute the friend he had lost.

THE END

Saint-Germain-en-Laye,
July, 1933.

APPENDIX I

ON ANCIENT CHINESE MAPS the course of the Tarim is shown flowing directly towards the east and receiving the waters of a tributary, the Konche Darya, before emptying itself into the Lop Nor (Lou Lan Hai) at $40^{\circ} 40'$ North Latitude.

In 1876-77 the Russian explorer Przevalsky discovered that the Tarim had deviated toward the south and that the Lop Nor was located one degree of latitude south of the place indicated on the Chinese maps.

The hypothesis then was that Przevalsky had discovered not the Lop Nor but another lake. Dr. Sven Hedin during his exploration of 1900 solved the problem, finding that both Przevalsky and the ancient Chinese maps were correct—there was only one lake, but it had changed its place with time. The bottom of the ancient Lop Lake had silted up, and caused a deviation in the course of the Tarim and the Konche Darya, which had moved the lake to the south. In our days the new Lop Lake has silted up in its turn, and the Tarim and the Konche Darya, returning to their former beds, have put the Lop Nor back to its original place. This change occurred in 1921 and was recorded and surveyed by Dr. Eric Norin, the geologist of Sven Hedin's expedition of 1930.

These remarkable hydrographic changes in the Lop desert are very important because of their relation to the great routes of Central Asia. Before the fourth century A.D. the silk road passed from Tunhuang by Lou-lan to Kuchar. Since the fourth century this region has become impassable,

and the caravans were forced to make a detour round the desert, first by the south and then by the north. Now the Lou-lan region is coming back to life ; the vegetation there is luxuriant, and the ancient silk road is again practicable.

Sven Hedin compares the wanderings of the Lop Nor to the swinging of a pendulum with a period of oscillation lasting fifteen centuries.

(See *Across the Gobi Desert*, by Sven Hedin. E. P. Dutton & Co. New York, 1932.)

APPENDIX II

By Father Teilhard de Chardin

I

GEOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS IN CHINA

DURING the Citroën Expedition to Central Asia it was possible to make geological observations only on the journey from Peking to Aksu and back. The most original results—those concerning the section from Kalgan to Hami—have been set forth in the explanatory memorandum accompanying the geological map of our itinerary on a scale of $\frac{1}{1,000,000}$ published by the *Revue de Géographie physique et géodynamique*.¹ The purpose of the present simpler and more comprehensive note is not so much to draw attention to these new data as to give a concise survey of the contribution to general geological knowledge made by the Expedition on its way across China and Sinkiang.

It is concerned with two principal regions in this territory: the Mongolian Plateau (between Kalgan and Hami) and the Tian Shan (between Hami and Aksu).

1. *The Mongolian Plateau*

To the traveller advancing westward from the coastal plain of Peking Asia appears to consist of three stepped terraces. To the first and lowest of these terraces (reached by the Nankow Pass) belong the Chansi bluff, Chensi, north of the Tsinling Mountains, and the country of the

¹ 1932, Vol. V, fasc. 4.

Ordos. The third and highest are formed by the lofty massifs of Tibet and the Tian Shan, "the Roof of the World." The intermediate level (which the Expedition reached by the Kalgan Pass) is formed by the Gobi or Mongolian Plateau.

Regarded as a whole, the Mongolian Plateau has the appearance of an immense peneplain of an average height of 3,200–4,600 feet, slightly depressed towards its centre, and raised near its edge (to the north, east and south) by a system of scarps showing various signs of breaking and folding, here and there accompanied by eruptions : worn ridges of the Siberian Altai and the Baikal, which geologists believe to be one of the oldest elements in the world's architecture ; the Great Khingan scarp (dominating the Manchurian plain and the Jehol country) marked by powerful Secondary (granitic, rhyolitic, and andesitic) and Tertiary (basaltic) eruptions ; the Kalgan cliffs beneath the basalts ; the Ta-t'sing-chan scarp, formed by the upheaval of an ancient crystalline foundation ; lastly the Ala Shan wall, spreading away in sheets over the Ordos.

Except for a few gaps through which they flow northwards to the Arctic Ocean or diverge towards the Pacific (Amur), the waters of this vast territory have no outlet : permanent or temporary "gols" die away in "nors" which are usually saline, the whole distributed in enclosed basins, according to the depressions or ridges carved by wind or rain in the rocks of varying degrees of hardness of which the plateau is composed.

Little was known of the geology of the Gobi before the great expedition of 1922 to 1930 led by Dr. R. Chapman Andrews, when its geologists—Professors Berkey and Morris—carried out their valuable researches. Two opposing elements are to be found in the structure of the Mongolian Plateau : first an ancient base levelled towards the middle

of the Secondary times, and then a complex covering of softer sediments gradually deposited between the lower cretaceous period and the present day in the hollows of the rocky tableland.

(a) *The ancient base of the Mongolian Plateau*

In the case of the Gobi, as in that of the Sahara, a legend was current that these vast desert solitudes were the dried-up bottom of the sea. In reality, the Mongolian Plateau has since the dawn of geological time shewn itself to be one of the most continental regions of Asia. Along its eastern and southern borders dies away the dominant marine series (strata containing Trilobites and Orthoceratites) which marks the beginning of palæozoic times in China proper. And in place of these calcareous formations, shales, sandstones and yet more shales (mud and sand brought down from the north by some great river) repose—often directly—on the levelled mass of ancient crystalline rock which forms in Central Asia, as elsewhere, the lowest recognisable formation of any ancient continent. At one time, however, towards the end of the Carboniferous period, the whole of the Mongolian Plateau was submerged by the sea. But generally the only trace left of this is to be found in the thin banks of limestone containing corals and crinoids. After this mysterious invasion the waters of the ocean withdrew for ever. The sandstones and black shales—the “Khangai series,” as geologists call them—continued to accumulate between the ridges of gneiss. And then, apparently towards the close of the Triassic period, a remarkable phenomenon took place. Like a breaking ice-floe, the crystalline and sedimentary shell bulged, perhaps, and then cracked; and through all the joints a flood of granite, fringed with various porphyries, intruded from beneath, impregnated and transformed that which had not been

permanently submerged by the sea. This was probably nothing to compare with the overthrusts of the Himalayas and the Alps, but rather a general crumpling of materials enclosed within rigid masses. It is difficult for us to picture the external effects of these not very profound upheavals. What is certain is that once the new form of the surface had been determined by the great internal movements, erosion again came into play. During the course of the Jurassic period denudation extended to the level at which the granites appear mixed with the banded and partly re-crystallised shales. It re-levelled the rugged whole of what has become the present base of the Mongolian Plateau. Then (in early Cretaceous times) began the period, which still continues, of the constant formation and displacement of closed sedimentary basins.

(b) *The Sedimentary Basins of the Gobi*

The sandstones and black shales of Khangai seem, as has been said, to have been deposited in a system of estuaries. After the great eruptions had come to an end the Gobi acquired its most continental characteristics. Lacustrine muds containing the imprints of insects and fish ; quick-sands in which may be found embedded the remains of large vertebrate animals ; desert dust in which, as ostriches would do to-day, dinosaurs were wont to bury their eggs ; and in particular, red earth recalling our tropical laterites—such are the various types of deposits (the older ones slightly warped, those more recent horizontal) which the prospector encounters in the shape of more or less extensive remnants, on the ever wind-swept surface of the Mongolian Plateau. Rarely are these formations so superimposed as to give a long, continuous section ; but, as though the depressions in which they have collected had in the course of ages gradually changed position, owing to the action of

erosion and probably also of some internal undulation of the base, their extremities generally appear separately, or divided by wide gaps, presenting a puzzle which the geologist would be incapable of solving were it not for the help of admirably preserved fossils.

Palæontologically speaking, the ancient sandstone-schist base of the Gobi is dishearteningly meagre. Save for a few faint impressions of plants, no vestige of life has yet been discovered in these cleft and altered rocks. Nevertheless, on the other hand, the overlying sediments formerly regarded as barren have proved astonishingly rich in fossil remains. And it is to the Andrews Expedition that the credit must be given of having collected from a dozen clearly distinguished levels—ranging from the Cretaceous to the end of the Tertiary era—a wonderful series of forms rarely met with : dinosaurs in conjunction with tiny mammals in the Cretaceous period, rhinoceros-like animals and gigantic carnivora in the Mid-Tertiary period, strange-looking mastodons in the Miocene—in fact the reconstruction of a world over several millions of years.

One day it may perhaps be possible, by combining the study of these successive faunæ with a detailed analysis of the sediments in which they are found, to reconstitute in broad outline the physiographical and climatic history of the Gobi during the course of this long period. Already one point seems to stand out clearly. As soon as the base of the Mongolian Plateau was definitely formed at the end of the Secondary era, it gave indications of arid conditions foreshadowing the desert ; and these characteristics became rapidly accentuated towards the close of the Tertiary era. Towards the completion of the Pliocene period an immense erosion spread wide stretches of gravel round the rocky massifs, while prevailing winds drove the light sediments in clouds towards China. It was the beginning of a great denudation. During the Quaternary era large

“nors,” with whitish sterile mud, still covered the bottoms of the basins, while the last loessic dusts swept up by the glacial wind were deposited like snow on the mountains of the Chansi, the Chensi, and the Kansu. The desert was finally established.

Such, in brief, is the vision of the past which, like a persistent mirage, rises and floats with increasing clearness before the eyes of the geologist crossing the Gobi. The evolution of this picture is not by any means due to the work of the Citroën Expedition alone. But, as its track-cars for the first time made it possible to trace east to west for several thousand kilometres a longitudinal section of the Mongolian Plateau, it can be said to have greatly extended and clarified our notions of the structure and history of that region. The exigencies of the journey did not permit of searching for fossils in the basins ; but on the other hand the nature of the ancient base (such as the age and distribution of the Khangai shales) and the extension to the whole of Central Asia of the last phases of major erosion provided matter for observations which will, it is hoped, be final.

2. *The Tian Shan*

Until one approaches Hami, coming from Suchow, the desert retains the essential characteristics of the Mongolian Plateau : crystalline belts running from east to west through masses of metamorphosed schists, in which are hollowed basins strewn with fragments of soft sandstones and red sediments. And then, as two landscapes dissolve one into the other in a film, the setting changes. A ridge, higher than those so far encountered, culminates in the 12,000 feet and more of the Karlik Tagh. At its foot the country falls away in a westerly direction as far as the eye can reach. And probably almost as far as Kuchar the schisto-granitic base mingled with banks of carboniferous limestone continues, growing ever

narrower, at a moderate height. But the balance is upset by a new structure. In place of the unending undulations of the Gobi peneplain, two features are prominent : the enormous ridge of the Celestial Mountains ; and at its feet—originating from the Turfan hollow (600 feet below sea-level), the immense depression through which the Tarim, flowing through a scrub of wild poplars, its current almost as powerful as that of the Yellow River, pours its waters into the shifting basin of Lop Nor—a single chain, a single basin. By pure simplification and interdigitation of the surface features an almost imperceptible transformation has been effected from the monotony of Mongolia to the monumental forms of Upper Asia.

Some profound and inward modification obviously accompanies and accounts for this change. It can in part be attributed to the increasing thickness of the sedimentary rocks, together with the reappearance of marine deposits.

The Mongolian ranges are, as has been said, mere intrusive islets or dykes, isolated by erosion amid the schists, which do not exceed a moderate thickness. In the lofty regions of the Tian Shan, on the contrary, calcareous rocks of the Primary era, associated with powerful detritic series, form the structure of the mountain almost without any mixture of eruptive ones. On the Gobi the soft sediments accumulated since the end of the Secondary era between the ridges of the base merely indicate former continental basins. Between the Tian Shan and the Kouen Lun, on the contrary, a region which for long remained open to the west, forming a gulf towards the inland seas, salt water flowed in for some way until the commencement of the Tertiary era. Large oysters, "cerithium," are found in the pink sandstones and clays of the Yarkand and Kashgar country. It is only in consequence of the Alpine movements (whence emerged what has been called the Third Terrace of Central Asia)—the bottle-neck having been

closed by the rise of the Pamir—that the Tarim Basin became the huge trough in which, over an extent of several thousand metres, the sand and mud washed down from the mountains have been, and still are, collecting, covered to the south-west by the ashy dunes of the Takla Makian.

Between two units so important and so dissimilar as the rigid mass of the Tian Shan and the soft mass of the Tarim it is natural that the effects of contact should attain proportions which are not indicated by the broken structure of the Mongolian Plateau. Thus have originated the sheets of pleistocene gravels, fringed with *loess*, which at the edge of the chain form glacis nearly twenty miles deep. So between the mountain and the plain the lagoon sediments and the “piedmont” gravels have crumpled to form an almost continuous fringe of foot-hills. In them may be read the history from the Jurassic to the beginning of the Quaternary era of the differential movements which gave rise to the present physical aspect of Upper Asia.

Owing to the political difficulties encountered, the Expedition to Central Asia was able to make only a superficial study of these momentous truths. The information it did succeed in gathering was slight in comparison with that collected at the same time by its rivals and friends of the Sven Hedin Expedition. Nevertheless, it was sufficient, by establishing the connexion between the geology of the Gobi and that of Sinkiang, to make it possible, with minor modifications, to distinguish and trace out more clearly several fundamental features of the internal structure and external configuration of the great continent.

II

PREHISTORIC CENTRAL ASIA

IN CONTRAST with the Continent of Africa, in which from north to south the oldest stone industries have left innumerable traces, in the present state of our knowledge, Asia, considered as a whole, appears as a mass subjected irregularly and with difficulty to human invasions. On its south-western border (Syria, Mesopotamia, Arabia) it was linked up in the palæolithic period with the African and Mediterranean regions. It has the same wealth and variety of instruments. Amygdaloid implements of a shape which would not cause surprise at Abbeville are met with even in the diluted laterites of southern India. In its northern expanses (the Siberias) the lower palæolithic culture seems to be lacking. Up to the present, only a middle and upper palæolithic culture, of Eastern European type, has been encountered towards Krasnoyarsk in the Yenisei terraces.

And finally, in the Far East, the sensational discovery of the Peking Man (a near relation of the *Pithecanthropus* of Java) seems to indicate that during the lower quaternary era (i.e. before the *loess* age) an extremely ancient human infiltration took place, from north to south, along the Pacific coast.

Between these three areas of penetration, Central Asia, despite the attractive theories of those who hope to locate there the cradle of humanity, continued, if one keeps to the facts, to form a bastion, a barrier which was not permanently forced (and then only precariously) until the neolithic period and afterwards.

The most ancient traces of mankind yet discovered in Central Asia were found from 1922 onwards in the upper and middle basins of the Yellow River (Chensi, Ordos, Kansu), amid the deposits of sand and *loess* which represent

the upper quaternary era. In the basic gravels of these formations shaped quartzites, more or less rounded, might represent the middle, or even the lower, palæolithic period. Dwellings in the mass of loess and sand itself have revealed—together with numerous remains of extinct animals (rhinoceroses, deer, buffaloes and antelopes of peculiar types)—a complete set of implements reminiscent of the upper palæolithic (Aurignacian) culture of Eastern Europe. Unfortunately no human bones have yet been brought to light.

Everything points to the conclusion that this “middle palæolithic” culture, of which the Expedition discovered interesting traces on a desert plateau between Suchow and Hami, marked the southern limit reached by a human wave which started from Russia or Siberia. It is nevertheless curious that the connexion for this period between the Kansu or the Chensi and the Upper Yenisei Valley should be so imperfectly established. The Gobi, like all deserts, presents a splendid field for the archæological prospector (though not necessarily for the stratigrapher). On its windswept soil it is impossible for the practised eye to miss the smallest cut stone. Yet, despite these exceptional conditions, American, French and Swedish archæologists have succeeded in collecting hardly any specimens which either from their appearance or situation would indicate that they really belonged to the palæolithic period. And even such limited meed of success applies only to Mongolia. Nearer the centre of Asia, in the Tarim Basin, nothing earlier than the neolithic period has so far been discovered.

The first distinct traces of a stable occupation of the region between the Yellow River and the Siberian border cannot be dated back beyond the mesolithic period. At that time, according to the observations made by Dr. Nelson (of the American Expedition), a population, still ignorant of the potter's art but skilled in the working of

bone and the fine chipping of brittle rocks, must have occupied the basins, already partially silted up, of outer Mongolia. Of the neolithic age quantities of human remains occur everywhere, distributed in two parallel zones stretching from east to west. We do not yet know whether the contrasts existing between these zones are attributable to a difference of age or merely one of culture.

To the north, from Tsitsihar to Urumchi, lies the "Mongolian Zone," the older in appearance, characterised by rough pottery and artistically worked chalcedony implements (arrow-heads, awls, and blades, with their residue of conical nuclei, pretty as jewels).

To the south, from the Shangtung to the western Kansu (and probably farther still) lies the "Chinese Zone," comparatively recent (end of the third millennium B.C.), in which abound, along with polished axes, fragments of painted pottery (red, black and yellow). Archæologists believe these to be indications of a train of civilisation which must have been connected with the proto-historic centres of Russian Turkestan and Asia Minor.

While traversing the Gobi, and even in the passes of the Tain Shan near Turfan, the Expedition repeatedly came across neolithic sites of the Mongolian type. Its route lay too far north for it to meet with painted pottery, but it did discover traces of a strange population, probably late in date, but of strictly stone-age culture: rough knives, scrapers, and sinkers for nets, made from pebbles of schist.

Even in the Mongolian Zone (in the midst of the desert one does indeed come upon fragments of small stone mills), the neolithic men of Central Asia led, to some extent, at least, an agricultural life. This does not necessarily imply that at this period their population was dense and their society firmly established. Except in the border steppes—the preserve of pastoral populations which have periodically invaded Europe—Central Asia, from the earliest

known times a desert, or threatening to become one, does not give its visitors the impression that it was ever, at any period, the birthplace of an autonomous civilisation. Conquered by mankind, it has remained for him a place of transit and contact between East and West. It has never been a home.

